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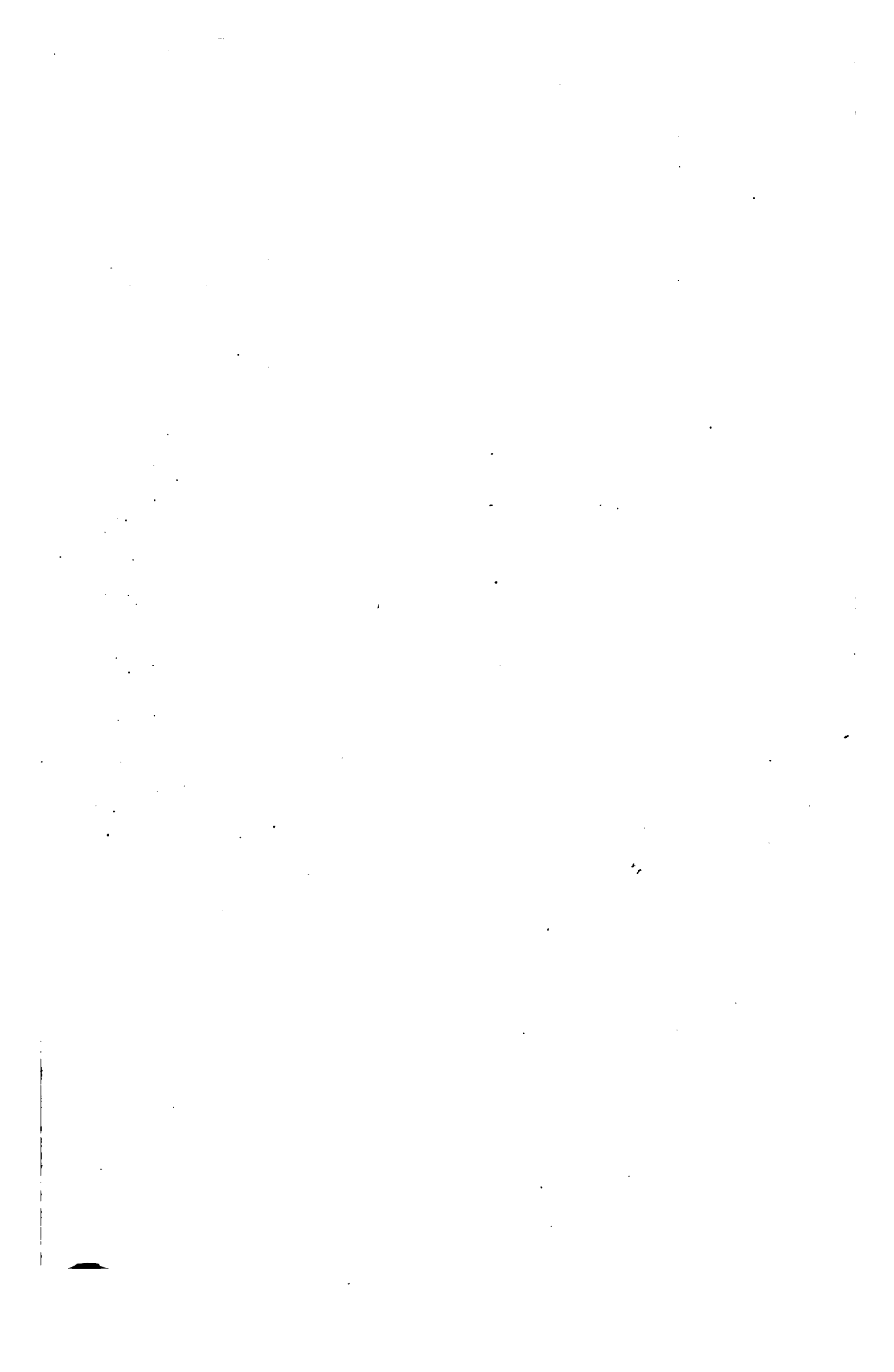
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# HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF THE

PRINCIPAL EVENTS AND CHARACTERS IN THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST FOUR CENTURIES

BY THE LATE

MOST REV. JOHN MAC HALE, D.D.  
ARCHBISHOP OF TUAM.

EDITED BY

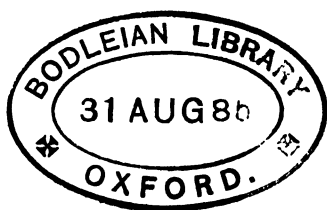
THOMAS MAC HALE, D.D., PH. D.

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## P R E F A C E .

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ONE who attempts to compress the most important events of an entire century into one chapter must feel the difficulty of the task. By an injudicious selection he may omit what is most worthy to be remembered, or give an undue importance to some trifling occurrence, to the exclusion of other topics more worthy of our attention.

The histories of the Church and of the Empire are so blended together that it would be difficult, nay, impossible, to point out the line of demarcation. Whoever undertakes to sketch the history of the one, cannot close his eyes on those scenes that have been acted in the other. The only difference between civil and ecclesiastical history is this—that, while the civil historian treats ecclesiastical affairs with a subordinate reference to that of the State, he who would write the history of the Church should make it the centre, casting an oblique glance at the transactions of the world as far as they had any influence on its fortunes.

Following this plan in a miniature scale, the Archbishop attempts to sketch the principal events of the history of the Church during the first four ages, in which he chiefly comprises the errors by which it has been assailed, the councils in which those errors have been condemned, together with some biographical views of the illustrious men who have exemplified its discipline in their lives, as well as illustrated its doctrine by their learning. He occasionally adverts to any momentous facts that occurred within the same period, which may serve as so many landmarks to guide our memories, directing principally our attention to Rome, on which the eye of every writer must be fixed as a meridian, by which alone the historical map of the world may be regulated.

By the promotion of the Archbishop from his position as Professor in the College of Maynooth to the dignity of titular Bishop of Maronia and Coadjutor of the Bishop of Killala, in the year 1825, these sketches were, it is to be regretted, permanently interrupted.



## Historical and Biographical Sketches.

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### CHAPTER I.

IN the stillness of the universal peace which was diffused over the Roman world towards the close of the reign of Augustus, Christ descends upon earth, preaches His doctrine, selects His Apostles, and erects the foundations of His Church on the ruins of the Synagogue. The seventy weeks of Daniel were now filled up, the promised Angel of the Lord appeared on the banks of the Jordan, the sceptre, which was defended by the valour of the first princes of the Asmonean line, dropped at length out of the feeble hands of their degenerate descendants, and Judea, weary of war and revolution, settled at length under the quiet dominion of Rome. The world was then divided between the religion of the Jews and the superstition of the Gentiles, and Christ, without attaching Himself to the feelings or prejudices of either, achieves a lasting victory over the combined opposition of both. From the commencement to the completion of His life, we contemplate a singleness and uniformity of character, which clearly demonstrates the divinity of His mission. Whilst He inveighs against the personal vices of the Pharisees and Sadducees, He enforces

respect for the public authorities, thus showing that His reproofs sprung from no other feeling but that of zeal for the glory of His Father. After preaching a doctrine which, from its sublimity, might startle human reason, and from its austerity be revolting to human passion, after fulfilling the ancient prophecies through the instrumentality of His enemies, who strove to elude their fulfilment, and deprive the Redeemer of the argument which their evidence could supply, He gives them their last accomplishment by His death, and seals His Divinity by the glory of His resurrection.

Scarcely is Christ risen from the dead when the Apostles come forward to attest the stupendous miracle. Numbers are converted by their first instructions ; and from Jerusalem they gradually spread themselves over the neighbourhood of Judea, until "their sound went over the whole earth."<sup>1</sup> In the commencement of their career they encountered opposition : but opposition only enflamed their zeal and gave fresh vigour to their exertions, and the stream which might have flowed with a feeble and placid course, if unresisted, became loud and impetuous, and gradually gathered strength from the obstacles that were thrown in its way. It was thus that St. Paul, who had at first resisted, was borne down by the tide of Christianity, and became himself most instrumental in its diffusion. From one of the most fiery persecutors of the infant Church he became its warmest champion ; and the natural vehemence of his temper, which, under the influence of nature, amounted to fury, when subdued and mitigated by the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xviii. 5.

Spirit of grace, was transformed into a pure and unconquerable zeal. To the Jews and to the Gentiles he unfolded the mysterious doctrines of justification and election, and surely none could better illustrate by his own example the lofty precepts which he taught.

The narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, for which we are indebted to the pen of St. Luke, is almost exclusively devoted to the lives and labours of St. Peter and St. Paul. Whilst the former, as became his privilege as Head of the Church, preached to the Jews, who were the first-born, the latter invited the Gentiles to a share in the covenant, and engrafted the wild branches on the fatness of the olive. St. Peter was soon, however, associated to the labours of St. Paul, being assured by a heavenly vision that the wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles was now levelled, and that the blessings promised to the seed of Abraham were to be extended to the whole earth.

The labours of the two Apostles were crowned with incredible success. In Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Macedon, and the Islands of the *Ægean* Sea, flourishing Churches were established. From the Acts of the Apostles it appears that St. Paul successively visited all those places, sometimes animating them by his presence, and in his absence illustrating and fortifying their faith by his written correspondence.

Of the writings and character of this Apostle an adequate idea can scarcely be conveyed but by viewing the original of the one through the powerful medium of the other. For him no mystery was too sublime, no peril too appalling, no adversary too for-

midable, nor was any duty of charity too revolting to his compassionate feeling for the distresses of mankind. Whilst traversing the mountains of Macedon and Achaia, and conveying the alms and offerings of those people to the poor of Jerusalem, his mind is sounding the vast abyss of grace and free-will, and he writes an epistle to Rome on those abstruse subjects, to cure the presumption of the Gentile converts. Again, he reproves the turbulent spirit of the Corinthians, and inveighs against the vain and foolish teachers who were defeating his own labours and distracting the infant Church. His care was not confined to the Gentiles; but though persecuted by the Jews as an apostate, he repays their hatred by the most tender and affectionate solicitude for their salvation. He demonstrates that the Jewish religion was necessarily limited to a definite time and to a single people, that it was the harbinger of a better hope, but set aside as unprofitable when that hope was accomplished. He represents it in a state of infancy, under the tutelage of guardians, and those who professed it, as bondsmen, as yet incapable of being free. In fine, he argues the inefficacy of its sacrifices from the frequency of their repetition, and deduces the abolition of the law from the translation of the priesthood.

His eloquence on every occasion breathes a more than human inspiration. His discourse on chastity and the last judgment shakes the guilty soul of Felix, the Roman governor, who tells him he will send for him at a more seasonable time.<sup>1</sup> But he was not master

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xxiv. 25.

of the grace of God ; and, like many who refuse admission to that grace when proffered, Felix was never again favoured with a call from the Apostle. Again, he stands before Festus and Agrippa, with the calm intrepidity of conscious innocence, and details the story of his conversion with such effect that he almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian.<sup>1</sup> In his travels to Greece he enters the city of Athens, and, after kindling their curiosity by pointing to the altar which was erected “to the unknown God,” he astonishes the Areopagus by an eloquence to which they were hitherto unaccustomed, and led them to the knowledge of this unknown God, whom they had but imperfectly adored. Accused of sedition, he appeals to the tribunal of Cæsar, and, after encountering a variety of perils by sea and land, he is at length cast into prison. Though his person is bound in chains, his unfettered mind is still active in promoting the interests of the Church ; and, from his prison in Rome, he directs to the churches of Ephesus and Philippi the admirable epistles which breathe all the fervour of the rest, subdued, however, by his suffering, into a tone of tenderer and more affectionate charity. After his release from prison he returns to Jerusalem, where, together with the rest of the Apostles, he assists at a synod to decide the controversy about the ritual observances. Though blessed with individual infallibility, the Apostles assembled together in council, and, after their decision, sent to the different churches their authoritative injunctions to adopt their decrees,

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xxvi. 28.

thus tracing for their successors in the ministry the future forms of ecclesiastical legislation.

It is a tradition, founded on the venerable authority of St. Athanasius, and, indeed, suggested by a passage in the Epistle to the Romans, that St. Paul penetrated into Spain.<sup>1</sup> Without discussing the probability of the tradition I shall only observe, that we are assured by Eusebius that, towards the end of Nero's reign, he and the Prince of the Apostles received the crown of martyrdom at Rome.<sup>2</sup> If the ardour of his zeal, the extent of his labours, and the sublimity of his genius formed the only claims to pre-eminence, St. Paul might rival, if not surpass, the chief of the Apostolical College. But authority springs not from personal excellence, but from a positive appointment derived from a legitimate source. The appointment of St. Peter to the office of supreme head of the Church is expressed in language too clear for ambiguity; and the metaphors of rock, and keys, and supreme pastor, which are uniformly appropriated to his person or his office, convey a startling impression of supreme ecclesiastical dominion. Whatever might be the personal excellence of St. Paul, it has not descended to any successors unless to the Roman Pontiffs alone, who have sometimes associated his name with that of St. Peter. Nor is it surprising that the bishops of Rome should associate the two great Apostles who, in the language of Tertullian, poured into that favoured city the full torrent of their doctrine and their blood.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xv. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 2, c. 25.

Of the other Apostles, though the labours were numerous, the lives are compendious. The inspired writings have left us no account of their preaching, and therefore we must recur to the traditions that are thinly dispersed through the works of the primitive Fathers. In the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> the most precious record that has reached us of these early transactions, we are informed that Scythia was the theatre of the labours of St. Andrew, while St. Thomas carried the tidings of the Gospel to the Parthians and the Indians. The two Jameses lived and died in Palestine, of whom the one, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, was put to death by Herod;<sup>2</sup> and the other, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, fell a victim to the fury of the Jews by being cast down from the battlements of the temple and overpowered with a shower of stones. The circumstances of his death are minutely told by Eusebius.<sup>3</sup> And so revered for his sanctity was James, Bishop of Jerusalem, that Josephus ascribes to the crime of his murder the vengeance which afterwards had fallen on the devoted city. St. Bartholomew preached to the Indians, and a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew, found among them by Pantaenus, a learned philosopher of Alexandria, encourages the belief that the latter Apostle penetrated to that remote country.<sup>4</sup> St. Simon, if we are to credit more recent historians, preached in Mesopotamia. The history of St. Jude is involved in still greater uncertainty.

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xii., 2.

<sup>3</sup> Euseb. l. 2, c. 23. He quotes at length the words of Hegesippus.

<sup>4</sup> Euseb, l. 5, c. 10.

Of St. Philip, however, our knowledge is more satisfactory. After having devoted his mission to the conversion of the Scythians, he died in Phrygia;<sup>1</sup> and a fragment of one of the epistles of Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, to Victor, Bishop of Rome, attests that, together with the authority of St. John, his predecessor, he might also appeal to that of St. Philip, whose remains still reposed in the city of Hierapolis.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the progress of the Gospel before the death of St. John, the beloved Apostle, who, after being exiled into the island of Patmos, under Domitian, returned to Ephesus under the mild sway of Nerva, his successor, where, full of days and merit, he closed his apostolical career.<sup>3</sup> Of all the Apostles chosen by Christ, St. John is unquestionably the loftiest in his doctrine as well as the tenderest in his charity. From the bosom of Christ, on which he was privileged to repose, he must have inspired the sublimity of the one and the ardour of the other. He was, therefore, reserved for the purpose of enlightening the Church by his learning, and warming it by his charity; and, when he went down, it was like the evening sun in a cloudless sky, shedding his parting glories on the world, and loitering, as it were, on its verge, until a constellation, beaming with the image of his brightness, should render the world insensible to his departure.

This constellation is generally known by the name of apostolical men, who faithfully transmitted the light which they received from the Apostles. Many of them,

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 5, c. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 1.



inheriting the zeal of the Apostles, carried the tidings of the Gospel to countries which were not visited by their labours ; and, in spite of all the opposition which it encountered from intestine and external enemies, the Gospel continued to make a steady progress during the first three centuries. Of the origin of Christianity in some of the western countries of Europe the accounts are doubtful and imperfect, and ignorance and vanity, which have so much obscured the infancy of profane nations, have thrown a similar darkness over some portions of the early history of the Church. Without, therefore, attempting to remove the mist which hangs over some of those remote traditions, we shall be content with the knowledge which genuine history supplies.

That St. James preached in Spain, and some of the other Apostles in Britain, was devoutly believed in these countries. Though we may safely resign the truth of those opinions and put them to the account of a pious or patriotic credulity, still the opinions prove the early conversion of those people. Towards the close of the second century there was scarcely a portion of the West that was not visited by the Gospel. From the wonderful agreement in one faith that pervaded the Celtic and German nations, as well as those of Egypt, Lybia, and the East, Irenæus, the Bishop of Lyons, drew a powerful argument to refute the errors of his age.<sup>1</sup> The language of Tertullian, a contemporary, will strengthen the attestation of Irenæus

<sup>1</sup> *Adversus hæreses*, l. 1, c. 3.

regarding the number and variety of the nations over which the Gospel was diffused. "The Christian religion has pervaded different countries in Getulia and Mauritania; it embraces the various nations of Gaul and all the boundaries of Spain; it has extended to the British islands which were inaccessible to the Roman arms, and comprehends Sarmatia, Dacia, Germany, and Scythia, and many other unknown regions, and islands, and provinces, that are beyond the reach of our knowledge or our calculation."<sup>1</sup>

Should we be disposed, with some sceptical writers, to distrust the representation of Tertullian, as overcharged by the zeal of a controversialist, a reference to the subsequent history of the African Church may correct our hasty criticism. Thirty years only elapsed from the death of Tertullian until the rise of the celebrated controversy about rebaptising heretics between St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, and the Roman Pontiff. Notwithstanding our previous ignorance regarding the progress of the Gospel in Africa, the flourishing state of its Church breaks at once upon our view, and we find St. Cyprian exercising the jurisdiction of Metropolitan over seventy-one episcopal churches. If, therefore, the Church had extended its limits so considerably in Africa, we must conclude that it made a proportional progress in other countries. To this

<sup>1</sup> "Getulorum varietates, et Maurorum multi fines, Hispaniarum omnes termini, et Galliarum diversæ nationes et Brittanorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita, et Sarmatarum, et Dacorum, et Germanorum, et Scytharum, et abditarum multarum gentium et provinciarum, et insularum multarum nobis ignotarum et quæ enumerare non possumus."—Tertullianus adversus Judæos, l. 7.

controversy, that was so warmly agitated in Africa during the middle of the third century, we are indebted for our minute and accurate knowledge of the extensive establishment of Christianity there. And if our information concerning its diffusion in other parts of the globe be less perfect, it is probably because the tranquil orthodoxy of their tenets did not excite much historical attention.

Among the Barbarians of Germany and Scythia it must be confessed that the progress of Christianity was slow, until after the conversion of Constantine. However, in the other countries of the globe it embraced such an ample jurisdiction as clearly to demonstrate the divinity of its origin. Gaul, Spain, Italy, and the immense tract of country lying between the Adriatic and the Bosphorus, formerly comprehending the provinces of Macedon and Thrace, and now known by the modern appellation of Roumelia and Albania, were included within the pale of Christianity. The early introduction of the Gospel into Greece and the Ionian Islands has been already noticed, to which we may add the Islands of the Mediterranean. Hence it appears that before the end of the third century the Christian religion had spread over the most flourishing and cultivated provinces of Europe. An Evangelist, St. Mark, was fixed, by the authority of St. Peter, in Alexandria as the first Bishop of that See, and the entire of Egypt soon embraced the faith and obeyed the jurisdiction of its Primate. The Church then gradually spread over the vast peninsula of Africa, from Pentapolis, on the borders of Egypt, to Mount Atlas, its

extreme limit on the West. Hippo and Milevium, which were afterwards illustrated by the labours of SS. Optatus and Augustine, now groan under the iron yoke of the Dey of Algiers;<sup>1</sup> and Carthage, now confounded with the barbarous States of Tripoli, exists no longer save in the story of her spiritual as well as temporal contests with Rome.

In Asia, where the Christian religion first arose, it continued to diffuse itself with such rapidity as to overspread the largest provinces in the East. The councils of Antioch, which condemned the errors and impieties of Paul of Samosata, and which Eusebius<sup>2</sup> assures us were attended by a very great number of bishops, attest the diffusion of the Gospel over Syria and the neighbouring countries. But, without fatiguing the reader with names, which might perplex his memory without conveying a sufficiently distinct knowledge, he may have a more precise idea of the progress of the Gospel by informing him that Christian Churches were thickly planted along the entire country of Asia Minor, which is bounded on the north by the Euxine, and on the south by the Mediterranean Seas, and extends over the immense tract of country from Constantinople to the Euphrates. Such, without exaggeration, and following the sober evidence of history, was the progress of the Christian

<sup>1</sup> When this essay was written those regions had not passed under the dominion of France.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> L. 7. c. 29. The next chapter mentions the names of many of the bishops, and contains the letter which they addressed to the churches—a curious picture of the character of Paul.

religion before it experienced the protection of the Roman emperors. From the view I have given it appears it was commensurate with the extent of the Roman empire, nay, it penetrated Ethiopia and Mesopotamia, and a Christian poet was enabled to proclaim, without exaggeration, that the faith of Rome had performed more extensive conquests than its arms had ever achieved.

Of an empire so vast and so widely extended it is natural to inquire what was the form of government instituted by Christ to secure its continuance. Unlike human governments, which are moulded according to the shifting changes of society, the Church is regulated by principles fixed and immutable as its great Architect. As His omniscience foresaw the different dangers to which it was exposed, His wisdom must have devised efficacious means for its preservation, and therefore the simple and comprehensive plan which He formed, instead of yielding to the vicissitudes of time or the caprices of mankind, was destined to control them. Without a strong principle of cohesion the Church would have shared the fate of those mighty empires which were dismembered into fragments, forming the foundation of new States totally dissimilar in habits and institutions. The members of the same body, united under the same head, is the expressive image by which the Apostle illustrates the union that binds the members of Christ's mystical body. Of the members of the human body, to follow up the illustration of St. Paul, some are more dignified than others, possessing a delicacy of perception

approaching nearer to spiritual than to animal functions, and placed in an intermediate position between the head and the inferior members. Thus, too, in the Church there is a regular gradation in its members, descending from its head to its bishops and pastors, who, while they exercise a jurisdiction over the faithful, connect the humblest members with the head by the chain of a mutual dependence. The instructions of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus reveal the ascendancy of the episcopal order over the subordinate gradations of the hierarchy; and that ascendancy has been recognised by the unanimous and uninterrupted tradition of the Church. The Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch appear, as far as we can descry them through the dimness of antiquity, rising in regular degree above the bishops, and embracing many episcopal churches within the sphere of their jurisdiction. Thus was raised the edifice of the Christian Church, exhibiting infinite wisdom in its plan and the most admirable symmetry in its construction, reposing on massive and stately columns, which, to prevent them from starting from their allotted places, were pressed down by the superior weight of the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff. If we do not discover in the first ages that regular correspondence and compact order which the Church exhibited in after times, it is no wonder, since the sharpness of the persecutions which it sustained prevented a more frequent intercourse. But when persecution had ceased, and the Church was restored to tranquillity and order, then the regular subordination of its ranks was accurately defined and

the respective jurisdiction of its chiefs scrupulously determined. Then one might truly exclaim : "How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob ; thy tents, O Israel," on beholding the Catholic Church marshalled like an army for battle, in the firm array of its members, and the compact order of its leaders rising in just gradations of superiority, while the influence of the Roman Pontiff, by controlling all its movements, gave union and energy to its exertions.

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## CHAPTER II.

IN the preceding chapter I have briefly traced the rise and progress of the Christian Church, and slightly sketched the most striking particulars in its constitution. It is the object of this and the next chapter to detail the opposition it encountered, as well from the persecutions that laboured to extinguish it in its birth as from the heresies that preyed upon its bosom. A reference to these two subjects will be connected with the description of some facts and the delineation of some characters which will diversify the disgusting sameness of error and persecution.

The number of the first heretics would swell a large catalogue, and a minute detail of their errors would be almost a repetition of the same extravagances. It will not, therefore, be expected that I should burden the reader's memory with a barren catalogue of names by dragging these ancient fanatics from their merited obscurity. Of the crowd of impostors who started up to disturb the repose of the Church there are some, however, on whom the peculiar extravagance of the tenets, as well as the talents of their biographers, have conferred an infamous renown. In exhibiting even those I shall be directed less by



the order of time than by the similarity of their opinions, thus furnishing the judgment with some fixed principles to which one may trace their congenial errors.

The unanimous consent of ecclesiastical writers has assigned to Simon the Samaritan the first place among the heresiarchs of the Church. Having been reproved by St. Peter for attempting to purchase with money a participation in the miraculous powers of the Apostles, the impostor began to disseminate among his disciples doctrines of the most blasphemous and immoral tendency. In the rude notion of this heresiarch, we discover some faint traces of that fantastic theology, which was afterwards reduced into a system by the ingenuity of his followers. He pretended that out of the fulness (*pleroma*) of the Divinity there issued a series of intelligences, gradually descending in the scale of existence to matter the lowest and least perfect of these productions. To correct, however, the malignant influence of matter, and to cure the miseries of human nature, He, the first and greatest of those *Æons* or intelligences, descended upon earth, and assumed the different characters of the persons of the Trinity, according to the different functions which He performed among the Jews and Gentiles. The extravagance of his doctrine could only be equalled by the licentiousness of his morals. As the pretended partner of his divinity, but as the real companion of his crimes, he conducted a woman of infamous character, whom he blasphemously pre-

sented to the adoration of his followers. The name and vices of this woman suggested to the impostor an identity with Helen, the Queen of Sparta,<sup>1</sup> who, after repeated transmigrations, reappeared upon earth to enkindle in the Church the spirit of disunion which had once been so fatal to Troy. After many wild adventures, we are informed by Eusebius that he at length arrived in Rome, where he practised on the credulity of numbers, until the magic spell by which he bound his deluded votaries was finally dissolved by the Prince of the Apostles.<sup>2</sup>

Menander, also a Samaritan, the disciple of Magus, and heir of his impieties, next deserves our attention. His pretensions were of a still bolder cast than those of his predecessor. Besides the assumption of the character of Saviour he insisted that his baptism not only expiated sin, but that it was also a charm against age and death, by conferring<sup>3</sup> the invaluable blessings of eternal youth and immortality.<sup>4</sup> Not to break the regular genealogy of error, I shall mention the names of Saturninus and Basilides, the joint disciples of

<sup>1</sup> "Proinde," says Tertullian, "eam de corporibus in corpora migrantem . . . illam Helenam fuisse exitiosissimam Priamo."

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 2, c. 14. Justin Martyr relates that Simon was adored as a god in Rome, and honoured with a statue erected between two bridges of the Tiber, with this inscription: "Simoni Deo Sancto." *Bibliothèque des Pères de l'Eglise*. Tom. 1, p. 50. Recent antiquaries, however, say that the inscription was "Semoni Sango," an ancient god of the Sabines.

<sup>3</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 36.

<sup>4</sup> "Postremo ubi sunt illi," exclaims the sarcastic Tertullian, "quos Menander in Stygem suam mersit."

Menander, who adopted his principles, with some additions from the Alexandrian school. The circumstantial accuracy with which the errors of those fanatics are detailed by some of the ancient Fathers may justly excite our surprise, since the wildness and incoherency of their systems are not redeemed by the charms of arrangement or composition which make fiction itself so agreeable. I shall reserve a fuller account of their theology for the more famous heresiarch, whose genius attempted to give form and consistence to the rude and indigested chaos of the opinions of his predecessors.

The errors to which I have just alluded were of a mixed origin, whose authors endeavoured to incorporate with the simplicity of the Christian religion the dreams of the Egyptian and Oriental philosophy. Among the Jews, however, another heresy sprung up, purely indigenous. Of that people there were many whose grosser conceptions believed Christ to be the Son of Joseph and Mary; and, as they were familiar with the humanity, they scrupled not to reject the Divinity of the Redeemer. Of those who were persuaded by the evidence of His miracles into a belief of His Divinity, and into an adoption of His religion, there were some who clung with an obstinate attachment to the observance of the Jewish law. The former have been known by the name of Ebionites, as characteristic, not of the poverty of their lives, but the meanness of their conceptions regarding the Redeemer.<sup>1</sup> The less

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 27.

guilty schismatics, who believed in the Divinity of Christ, but refused to resign the ceremonies of Moses, have been called Nazarenes.

The errors of Cerinthus are generally classed with those of the Ebionites. This difference, however, marks the kindred sectaries, that, whilst Cerinthus rejected with the Ebionites the divinity of Christ, he laboured to enlarge their unsocial system, and effect a coalition between them and the Gentile heretics. To reconcile their uncongenial errors, he pretended that Jesus was the Son of Mary and Joseph, but that at the time of His baptism Christ, one of the most exalted of heavenly intelligences, had descended on Him, who at the time of the crucifixion departed from His temporary abode, abandoning Jesus to the fury of His executioners. The inventive fancy of Cerinthus was not confined to those speculative errors. From the same impure source sprung the mischievous opinion that the elect were to reign a thousand years upon earth, and that their joys were to consist in the indulgence of the most licentious pleasures. If we are to credit the picture which Dionysius of Alexandria draws of this heretic, and which is still preserved by Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> Mahomet might have borrowed from him the idea of the houris of his sensual paradise. No wonder, therefore, modern liberality may smile at the story, if John, the venerable Apostle of Ephesus, should fly with precipitation from a bath which such a monster had polluted, and express his apprehension to his com-

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 28.

panions that the building might fall and involve them and Cerinthus in the same fate.

The next conspicuous names in the catalogue of heretics are Marcion, the author of Christian Manichæism, and Valentine, the chief of the Gnostics. To lay hold, however, on some clue to guide us amidst the labyrinth of the ancient errors by which the Church was assailed, it may be necessary to ascend to a remoter period to which we may trace their origin.

Soon after the death of Alexander, the city which has perpetuated his name and conquests became equally the mart of science and of literature. The study of philosophy was much encouraged by the patronage of the Ptolemies, whose liberality attracted learned strangers from the different quarters of the earth. This mutual intercourse softened the respective prejudices of those who flocked to Alexandria to drink wisdom at the same common fountain. A sort of treaty of forbearance for national prejudices was entered into by the hostile sects of philosophy. After this passive toleration they proceeded with calmness to inquire into the different systems, and consented to adopt whatever they found excellent in either, calling it by the name of the eclectic philosophy. Amidst the confusion of opinions which then prevailed, the doctrine of Plato claimed the ascendancy, and hence it was almost entirely embodied into the new system. Plato ruled supreme in the school of Alexandria; yet as these philosophers disclaimed subjection to any authority, their acquiescence was only the free homage of inquisitive minds to a superior understanding.

The Egyptian philosophers defended, with Plato, that the human soul was originally a portion of the Divine Essence, fallen, however, into a state of defilement by its union with the body, and destined, after repeated lustrations, to return to its native heaven and to be reunited with the Divinity. His doctrine concerning the Divine Nature, in which some pretend to have discovered traces of the Trinity, is confessed to be unintelligible by some of the ablest of the commentators.<sup>1</sup> When stripped of all the fanciful interpretation by which it has been obscured, it amounts to nothing more than that the Supreme Being contemplated the form which He was to impress upon the material world, as an architect conceives an idea of his work, to which form or idea Plato gave the name of Logos. This image, in the divine mind, is assimilated to the Son, though never called by that name in the writings of Plato, and the world, formed according to the model of this Logos, and animated with a Spirit called by this philosopher *anima mundi*, forms the third principle or person of Plato's trinity. Such is the simple origin of the boasted trinity of the Athenian sage, which has made such noise in ancient controversy, and in which nothing but a pernicious refinement in allegory, or the belief that he gleaned his knowledge from the prophetic books, could discover an analogy with the sublime doctrine of the Christian religion.

Another great source of error was the doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> Bergier, "Dictionnaire de Theologie," tom. 8, p. 255. He quotes among others the learned Brucker, who in his "History of Philosophy" acknowledges that Plato's pretended doctrine of the Trinity is wrapped in mysterious and unintelligible language.

emanations, or of spirits generated from the Divinity—a system which was first imported from the theology of the East. The existence of two principles—eternal and independent—formed the basis on which the whole structure of Persian philosophy reposed. Each principle produced a world congenial to his nature: the one was surrounded by a creation of light, the other of darkness. For ages these two beings lived in a state of sullen and distant independence, until at length the empire of the good god was invaded by the other. From thenceforth the two contiguous worlds rushed in upon each other, the elements of good and evil became blended, destined to sustain a perpetual conflict with each other, until the evil principle worsted in the struggle shall be chained in eternal darkness, and every particle of good, disengaged from his corrupt influence, shall at length return to its original fountain. From the mixture of those substances sprung a variety of intelligences who approached these principles as the nature of either predominated in their composition. Such is a “simple outline” of the Oriental philosophy which gradually found its way into Europe, and was incorporated with the system of its schools. Originally derived from Zoroaster, a celebrated sage of Persia, in the reign of Darius, it assumed, in the western world, the name of the Manichæan heresy from Manes,<sup>1</sup> its supposed founder, in the middle of the third century. However, its origin ascends to a remoter period, since it formed one of the leading features of the errors of

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 1, c. 31. The original name of this heresiarch was Cubricus, which he changed into Manes in Persia. (Socrates, l. 6, c. 22).

Cerinthus, and as early as the reign of Marcus Antoninus, was imported by Marcion from Pontus to Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst Marcion or Manes laboured to effect a union between the irreconcilable religion of Christ and the superstition of the Persians, Valentine, a native of Alexandria, conceived a bolder design of collecting the scattered rays of the Egyptian heresies, and of restoring to light and order the discordant elements of the Gnostic theology. It is surprising what patience has been bestowed on detailing the follies of those fanatics, which seem to defy method or combination. Having loosened his mind from the restraints of reason as well as of authority, Valentine imagined<sup>2</sup> eight *Æons* or superior intelligences, to which he assigned appropriate names and offices. This famous combination of the Egyptian impostor was composed of *Æons* of either sex, and from their union sprung twenty-two others, amounting to thirty subordinate divinities. In the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid there is nothing so wild as the tales which he seriously tells of the generation of his gods: but their wildness has nought of the pleasing illusion of the fictions of the Roman poet. Without, however, following the footsteps of Irenæus and Tertullian, who patiently tracked this fanatic through the darkest and most intricate avenues of his system, or attempting to explain the different processes which these fancied beings underwent in his mind, from the first idea to the perfection of his system, it will be

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 6, c. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Bibliothèque des Pères de l'Eglise," tom. 1, p. 85.



sufficient to observe that, like those of his predecessors, the errors of Valentine were destructive of the divinity of Christ. It is natural that a system composed of such a variety of materials would have branched into a multiplicity of errors, and hence this heresiarch had as many reformers of his doctrine as the number of his divinities was susceptible of new combinations. Among the most distinguished disciples of Marcion and Valentine were Tatian and Apelles, who adopted not, however, the entire extent of the errors of their masters, but might be said to have modified the Gnostic theology. The fame of Tatian has experienced many vicissitudes. By all he is acknowledged to have possessed great talents and a large stock of profane erudition, but to have been destitute of taste in the composition of his writings. About the extent of his orthodoxy or errors the learned are yet divided, and the philosophical sagacity of Brucker pretends to have discovered in Tatian's book against the pagans the latent venom of Manichæism, which escaped the eagle eye of Bossuet.

To pursue farther the history of those fanatics would be a curious but unprofitable inquiry. The sketch I have given may be interesting, as it exhibits a lamentable picture of the weakness and extravagance of the human mind. It is impossible to peruse the history of those early sectaries without the melancholy conviction that private judgment, freed from the sober restraints of authority, strays into a thousand follies, and is the most delusive of all guides. It is not, perhaps, such a just subject of surprise that

the early heretics adopted such reveries, as that moderns seriously insist on the benefits of private judgment after such lamentable experience of its excesses. A more detailed view of their errors would be disproportioned to the limits of my plan; and the reader may be more anxious to advance than still to loiter along the borders of Egypt and of Palestine, pursuing the dark and fleeting spectres of the heretics of the first centuries.

However, to preserve the chain of error, I must not omit the names of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata, who confounded the Persons of the Trinity by refining them into mere abstractions. Independently of his errors and views, Paul derived much celebrity from the friendship of Zenobia, the famous Queen of Palmyra. It is, perhaps, to the latter circumstance that the unfortunate Bishop of Antioch is indebted for his disastrous renown. The patroness of Longinus, she was equally anxious to give her protection to all who were distinguished for genius or science. Paul was numbered among those whose merit or good or bad fortune entitled him to Zenobia's favour; and he strove to requite her friendship by yielding to her prejudices the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. It has been remarked that when the morals are once corrupt the transition to erroneous doctrines is easy and natural; nor can we be surprised at the flexibility of Paul of Samosata on the speculative tenets of the Church, when we recollect the melancholy portrait of his life that has been left us by the bishops of his own time.

From the natural alliance between heresy and

schism it may be deemed expedient to introduce here the schisms which, during the first three centuries, shook the peace of the Church. Towards the middle of the third century the Roman sanctuary was invaded by the ambition of Novatian,<sup>1</sup> a proud and factious priest, who availed himself of the oppressed state of the Church to favour his forcible intrusion into the See of Rome. As his pretensions to the chair of Peter were superseded by the superior merits of Cornelius, he could easily discover in his appointment proofs of an irregular election. His discontent was inflamed by the acts of Novatus, an African priest, who, after having sown the seeds of schism in Africa, was ambitious of exciting similar dissensions in Rome. By the aid of his wicked associate, Novatian was enabled to give to his intrusion the colour of a legitimate appointment, and to seduce some unwary prelates into a support of his pretensions. Such is the beauty of virtue that the most abandoned characters are obliged to borrow its mask to forward their mischievous projects. Novatian laboured to enlist in his support this feeling in favour of virtue, and to conceal his turbulent ambition under the specious pretext of zeal for the purity of God's Church. Numbers had fallen into apostasy from the violence of persecution. Whilst the Church, like the good Samaritan, strove to bind up their wounds by pouring in the acid wine of penance, as well as the healing oil of charity, Novatian affected to be shocked by this indulgence. Like the Pharisees

<sup>1</sup> Euseb, l. 6, c. 43. The historian gives us at length the character of Novatian, as drawn by Cornelius in his letter to Fabius, Bishop of Antioch.

who brought the woman caught in adultery to our Redeemer, thus concealing their hatred of Him under a pretended zeal for the law, Novatian but ill-disguised his enmity to the Church under an affected regard for its sanctity, whilst he denied its power to remit certain enormous transgressions. His counterfeit austerity imposed upon numbers. So widely spread was the contagion that numerous councils were convened in Africa, Asia, and in Rome to condemn his schismatical adherents. Fortunately their fraud and ambition were unmasked by the zeal of St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, whose learning and eloquence were enlisted in the defence of the unity of the Church, and the authority of the injured Bishop of Rome. It was then he undertook his celebrated work on the unity of the Church, in which he exhibits a lucid picture of the admirable order that pervades it—a work which, for the justness of its reasoning, and the splendour of its eloquence, has entitled its author to a place among the most distinguished champions of the Church.

He, however, who had so ably advocated the cause of Cornelius warmly contended with Stephen, his successor, and Cyprian was near violating that unity which he had so ably defended. It has been remarked that opposite extremes often approach each other. The remark has been exemplified in St. Cyprian, who from his aversion to those who had separated from the unity of the Church, and his abhorrence of their religious rites, was almost hurried beyond the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy. He not only insisted that the Novatians were out of the pale of Catholicity, but that they

were also incapable of conferring by the sacrament of Baptism the character of a Christian. He therefore insisted that such as had received Baptism from the heretics should, on their return to the Catholic Church, be again immersed in the waters of regeneration. This opinion, which he derived from Agrippinus, one of his predecessors,<sup>1</sup> was fortified by the authority of Tertullian, whom he revered as a master. He held two numerous synods in Carthage, composed of the Bishops of Africa and Numidia, who adopted, with an easy assent, the opinions of their primate. St. Stephen condemned the acts of those synods, and vindicated the ancient and universal tradition of the Church. St. Cyprian was betrayed by the warmth of his zeal into language which was disrespectful to the Roman Pontiff. The support of Firmilian, Bishop of Cappadocia, gave confidence to St. Cyprian. But though opposed by such formidable prelates, it is a strong argument in favour of the indefectible orthodoxy of the See of Peter, that the doctrine of his successor finally triumphed. St. Cyprian maintained his opinions with obstinacy; it does not, however, appear that he incurred the guilt of schism. It is conjectured by St. Augustine that he changed his opinions before his death. Whatever might have been his errors they were the effusions of a generous zeal, free from the cool and deliberate malignity of heresy. In defending them he was hurried, it is true, beyond the boundaries of moderation. The Bishop of Carthage has been enrolled in the

<sup>1</sup> "Bibliothèque des Pères de l'Eglise," tom 1, p. 311.

Calendar of the Saints, and we may therefore conclude, with St. Augustine, that whatever stains might have been contracted during that angry controversy were utterly effaced by the blood of his martyrdom.

The dispute concerning the celebration of Easter deserves to be noticed in the most compendious sketch of the transactions of the Church. On the natives of these countries the controversy has nearer claims, since from ignorance our ancestors have been ranked with the Quartodecimans. A fuller and more accurate knowledge of that dispute, as well as of the circumstances that led to a variety of discipline, shall show how erroneously the ancient Irish were supposed to have dissented from the religion of Rome, or to have first derived it from an Asiatic origin.

From the infancy of Christianity the Western and Oriental Churches varied in the time of celebrating Easter. The latter rigidly adhered to the Jewish custom of keeping Easter on the evening of the 14th day of the moon of March—a custom which they gloried in having borrowed from the practice of St. John. The Roman Church transferred the observance of the Paschal rite to the following Sunday—a custom which, besides being inherited from the Prince of the Apostles, was more immediately commemorative of the resurrection of our Redeemer. Overtures for a uniformity of discipline were frequently tried without effect. But the spirit of charity and concord was not violated. Towards the middle of the second century, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, waited on Anicetus, the Roman Pontiff, to adjust the difference of the Churches. The

negotiation proved fruitless ; yet Polycarp continued to enjoy the friendship and communion of the Holy See. Towards the close of the same century, Victor, eager to subdue the obstinacy of the Asiatics, insisted on their conformity with the practice of the Roman Church. The rigour of the Roman Pontiff had only the effect of inflaming their opposition. Polycrates, at the head of a synod at Ephesus, pressed the hereditary practice which had been derived from the Apostles Philip and John,<sup>1</sup> and consecrated by the adoption of several illustrious bishops, among whom he numbered seven of his own kinsmen. The zeal of St. Victor was exasperated by the bold remonstrance, but the seasonable moderation of Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, intercepted the threatened vengeance of the Pope. It is well observed by Eusebius, at the conclusion of Irenæus' letter, that the illustrious prelate of Gaul exemplified in his conduct the meaning of his name whilst he acted as peacemaker to the Church. It is a monument which reflects honour on his name ; nor is it possible to perceive the simple and pathetic appeal to the good sense and clemency of the Roman Pontiff without admiring the spirit of charity that animated his breast.

A century had yet elapsed before the controversy was brought to a final issue. The fathers assembled at Nice felt the necessity of a uniformity of discipline on this question ; and, after fixing the controversy regarding the Divinity of the Son of God, determined

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 5, c. 24.

the day on which the Christian world should celebrate the Paschal festival. The Sunday after the fourteenth day of the moon of March was agreed on by the assembled bishops as the most appropriate ; and to prevent its possible coincidence with the Jewish Passover, it was likewise decreed that it should never be celebrated before the vernal equinox. There were still many individuals whose obstinacy was not vanquished by the authority of the Council of Nice, and these were separated from the unity of the Church.

For more than three hundred years our ancestors differed from the Roman Church in celebrating the festival of Easter, and this circumstance has furnished some writers, of more ingenuity than candour, with specious arguments for deducing the Christianity of the ancient Irish rather from an Asiatic than from a Roman origin. However, the learned Protestants, Ussher and Prideau, have rejected the unfounded theories of those writers, and confessed, in spite of their prejudices, the original conformity between the Irish and Roman Churches. It requires no profound investigation to demonstrate the absurdity of the hypothesis that traces the religion of the Irish to an Oriental source, or to account without such a supposition for the practice of our ancestors.

The movable nature of the feast of Easter depending on astronomical calculations, in which any error might be attended with different results, will explain this diversity. Immediately after the Council of Nice, the duty of ascertaining the day of Easter was entrusted to the Church of Alexandria, on account of



the reputation of that city for astronomical science. The Patriarch of Alexandria transmitted the calendar to the Roman Pontiff, who, by timely letters to the Patriarchs and Primates of the different churches, announced the time on which they were to commence the penitential austerities of Lent. To obviate the errors of which the former methods of computation were productive, the Alexandrians adopted a cycle of nineteen years to calculate the Paschal lunation. The same cycle had been adopted by the Romans; but when the mutual correspondence between Rome and Alexandria was interrupted, the former city relapsed into the erroneous method of calculating by the old cycle of eighty-four years. This produced a considerable diversity in the practice of both Churches, until the sixth century, when the Romans adopted another cycle composed by Dionysius Exiguus, and which corresponded with the Alexandrian rule. It was during this interval of abandoning the cycle of Alexandria and adopting that of Dionysius that Christianity was introduced from Rome into Ireland; and consequently the time of celebrating the Easter festival was determined by the same erroneous standard which the Romans had adopted. When they returned again to the correct computation of the astronomers of Alexandria the Irish were unwilling to adopt the reformation. Such was their attachment to the religion they received from St. Patrick, that they indignantly rejected any change, even in a matter of discipline. They were in error, it is true, but it was an error originally founded on a conformity with the Church of Rome, and which

they shared in common with many of the Western Churches. When Rome had reformed her calendar they obstinately clung to their own. Hence an opposition between both Churches, which, because the celebration of Easter was the object of the two disputes, has been compared with the odious heresy or schism of the Quartodecimans.

But the invidiousness of the charge will best appear from this circumstance, that whilst the Quartodecimans uniformly celebrate Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon of March, the Scots or Irish, if we are to credit the testimony of Bede, as uniformly transferred it to the following Sunday. This is a discrepancy of such a marked character as to show that our religion was not immediately derived from an Asiatic source. Nay, the regular translation of the festival to Sunday proved a perfect identity with the general custom of the Western Churches. An anecdote related in the ecclesiastical history of the Venerable Bede, may further illustrate the truth of these observations.

He tells us that in consequence of the variety of discipline regarding the celebration of Easter, a sharp disputation was maintained on that subject in the presence of Oswin, King of Northumberland. The disputants were Wilfrid, who received his education at Rome, and Coleman, a native of Ireland, and then Abbot of Hy or Iona. Wilfrid warmly supported the practice of the Church of Rome, while Coleman maintained with equal obstinacy the orthodoxy of his Irish ancestors. Pressed by the authority of St. Peter, which was brought forward by his opponent, Coleman

attempted to shield himself by the example of the favourite Apostle of Christ. However, the superior learning of Wilfrid dissipated the feeble subterfuge by instantly showing that the practice of the Scots was no less opposed to the Asiatic than to the Western Church. The force of Wilfrid's reasoning was felt by the King of the Northumbrians, who facetiously observed that he would side with St. Peter in order to secure his interest in opening to him the gates of the kingdom of heaven. The conversion of the king from the prejudices of his education was the most signal evidence of the victory of Wilfrid, and the arguments which he used may still be effectually wielded against those who strive to identify the practice of our ancestors with the errors of the Quartodecimans.

Such were the leading heresies and schisms which during the first ages defamed the purity or disturbed the peace of the Christian Church. From close observation of the ancient and modern sectaries we may come to the conclusion that they may be all traced to the same uniform principles of pride, impatient of the weighty mysteries, and profligacy mutinying against the precepts of the Catholic religion. That heresies should spring up in the Church has been foretold by our Redeemer, and the history of the Church has furnished the melancholy attestation of the truth of His prediction. The existence of those evils is a mysterious subject, calculated alike to awaken our gratitude and commiseration : commiseration for those who have the misfortune to be its victims, and gratitude because we have escaped the contagion of its example.

The abettors of heresy have literally fulfilled the Scriptures by calling good evil and evil good, whilst they reproach the Catholic Church with idolatry, and call error reformation. They have reformed the Church, it is true, but the successive reformations of the sectaries, like the sewers which carry off the corruptions of a large city, have served as so many channels to discharge from the Catholic Church the errors and vices which, flowing from the corruption of man, might have settled on its bosom, and communicated their infection to the waters of life.

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## CHAPTER III.

HAVING described the progress of the Christian religion during the first three centuries, together with the heresies and schisms which troubled its peace and defiled its purity, it may be necessary to turn the reader's attention to the external hostility, which during the same interval threatened its extinction. Scarcely did the Apostles begin to announce the truths of Christianity when they experienced from the Jews the sharpest persecution. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that they were cast into prison, from which they were released by the interposition of heaven. The vigilance which was directed towards the Christian religion from its infancy, and the opposition it provoked, have contributed to the satisfactory evidence which surrounds the early history of the Church, and to clear it from the suspicions of fable with which the early stages of every other history are disfigured.

The blessings of Christianity which were first proffered to the Jews, and by them indignantly rejected, were next tendered to the acceptance of the

Gentiles; and the seed which was cast in vain in the ungrateful soil of Judea began to thrive and flourish amongst the pagan nations. The rapidity of its growth soon excited alarm, and the rulers of the heathén world resolved to eradicate it from the earth. The persecutions of the Jews and Gentiles, though similar in effect, sprung from different causes. The narrow and intolerant spirit of the Jews was mortified by the general diffusion of the blessings which they fondly hoped would be perpetually and exclusively confined to themselves. The Gentiles, on the contrary, were alarmed at the progress of a new religion, which without compromise or exception proscribed the worship of their ancient divinities. With the exception of a few the persecutors of Christianity were the worst of the Roman emperors, and it is the glory of the Christian religion that its cruellest enemies were at the same time the deadliest foes of the happiness of mankind.

Notwithstanding the cruelty of his character the Christian religion experienced no opposition from Tiberius, who, if we are to credit the accounts of ancient writers, proposed to the Senate to have its author enrolled among the gods. But the God of the Christians disclaimed such ignominious capitulation. The Gospel continued its progress under the two successive reigns of Claudius and Caligula, undisturbed by the wanton and capricious cruelty which proved so fatal to the rest of the empire.

Nero is the first of the Roman emperors who

signalised his cruelty against Christianity ; and though ecclesiastical history has not preserved the names of many who were crowned with martyrdom under his reign, we may collect from Juvenal and Tacitus sufficient evidence of his merciless hatred towards the Christians. We are informed by those two writers that the suspicion of having set fire to the city of Rome, which was fastened on Nero,<sup>1</sup> was transferred by him to an obnoxious sect known by the name of Christians, who were clothed in the skins of wild beasts covered with pitch which was lighted up with faggots, and then hunted down by the public execration. It is unnecessary to dwell on the character of Nero, whose name conveys the idea of a monster to every mind. During the first five years of his reign, while he respected the lessons of Seneca, he ruled with clemency and wisdom. Scarcely, however, had he renounced the authority of this philosopher than he began to exhibit the most sudden and strange alternations of conduct which ever marked and disgraced the human character. Now a buffoon, and again a tyrant, he was almost at the same moment the jest and terror of the Roman people. Not content with the sovereignty of the world, he contended for the empire of Parnassus. To question his supremacy among the votaries of Apollo was often no less fatal than to canvass his right to the throne ; and so rapid were the transitions of his capricious passions, that the convulsions of laughter,

<sup>1</sup> Taciti Annal. l. 15, 44.

which were excited by his levity, not unfrequently subsided in the convulsions of death. The reign of Nero has been illustrated or disgraced by the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the light which has been shed by the lives and writings of these Apostles has thrown a more dreadful glare over this hideous deformity of their murderer.

After the death of Nero the empire was disputed by three imperial candidates, Otho, Galba, and Vitellius, during whose insecure and fleeting dominion the Christians advanced in numbers, practising the peaceable virtues of the Gospel, and unmoved by those angry contentions which shook the peace of the empire. It was the boast of Tertullian that the Christians remained quiet spectators of those revolutions without siding with any of the factions of the time. After the rival candidates had exhausted their mutual strength in a fruitless struggle, the empire was gained by the superior fortune of Vespasian, whose clemency or policy tolerated the Christian religion. The Jewish people had now filled up the measure of their guilt, and arrived at the period which the ancient prophecies had fixed for their destruction. The more they sunk in the political scale the more they seemed to indulge in the visions of universal dominion, and to calculate on the repetition of the same supernatural wonders which illustrated their early history. Provoked by their fury, which sometimes vented itself in breaking the statues of the emperors, the Romans resolved to annihilate a race which no measure of policy could



reclaim. Accordingly, Vespasian sends a powerful army to Judea, entrusting to his son Titus the conduct of the war. In the annals of human misery there is no story so replete with tragic incidents as that which records the fall of Jerusalem. The anger of the Almighty was visible through every stage of the siege. The feelings of nature seemed to have been extinguished in the breasts of the inhabitants, and to have been replaced by a dire fanaticism, which steeled them against the counsels of humanity or reason. The incorrigible obstinacy of this infatuated people did not fail to strike the Roman general, who confessed that in the capture of Jerusalem he was but the instrument of the mysterious vengeance of heaven. The Temple, the pride of ages and centre of their worship, was demolished, more than a million of the inhabitants perished in the siege of the city, and the rest, in the fulfilment of the prophecies, are scattered among the nations, to bear witness to the divinity of Him who was crucified by their fathers. Julian, in the frenzy of his impiety and his power, thought, by throwing discredit on the prophecy of our Redeemer, to eradicate His religion from the earth. Little did he suspect that in the hands of Him who laughs at the designs of human folly he was to become the last instrument of its complete fulfilment. By Titus the temple was levelled to its foundation, while the substructure lay untouched. By Julian the foundations were cleared away for the reconstruction of the edifice. No sooner was that work accomplished than balls of fire issued

from the earth, and forced the workmen to desist from the impious undertaking, leaving the words of the Redeemer literally verified, that "a stone shall not be left upon a stone," because the Jews had not known the day of their visitation.

Domitian, the degenerate son of Vespasian, succeeds his brother Titus; and had that prince been actuated by the refined and malignant policy which Tacitus imputes to Augustus<sup>1</sup> in choosing Tiberius for his successor, in order that the contrast of their characters might enhance the lustre of his own reign, Titus could not surely have chosen a fitter successor. In the two brothers were exemplified the opposite qualities of clemency the most compassionate and cruelty the most unfeeling; and the zeal with which Titus sought to deserve the affections of mankind, Domitian seems to have emulated in courting their detestation. After exhausting his cruelty on all who were the objects of his fears he directed his fury against the Christians, terrified, it is said, by apprehensions similar to those of Herod,<sup>2</sup> lest he should be supplanted by the promised ruler of the royal house of David.

So sharp was the persecution raised against the Christians that, in the forcible language of Tertullian, it would seem as if the soul of Nero had passed into Domitian, in whom it resided with a fresh and more active energy. Some of the most illustrious families

<sup>1</sup> Annal. l. 1, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 3. c. 19, 20. The historian relates from Hegesippus the conference that passed between Domitian and the relatives of our Lord.

in Rome suffered for their religion. Among them was Flavia Domitilla,<sup>1</sup> the near relative of one of the Consuls of Rome. It was after mocking the efforts of Domitian's rage by coming, like the Hebrew confessors, unhurt out of a caldron of boiling oil, that St. John was banished to Patmos, where he was favoured with those lofty visions which have since exercised the ingenuity of devout as well as profane commentators, and which, we may safely affirm, will ever elude the efforts of human wisdom. Having exhausted, by his tyranny, the patience of the Roman people, Domitian at length fell beneath the hand of a domestic assassin. We are indebted to the eloquent pen of the younger Pliny for some traits of this execrable tyrant. "Shut up in his palace, like a wild beast in his den, he now sated his fury with the blood of his domestics, and again meditated, in horrid silence, the moment he might spring for fresh prey beyond the limits of his enclosure. Fear and horror kept continual watch at the portals of his palace, and admission or exclusion inspired the same terrors. It was death to break the silence of a prince who strove to hide himself from the eyes of mankind, and who never issued from his solitude but to turn Rome into a wilderness. However, from within the impenetrable walls, and the very depths of the enclosures in which he sought safety and repose, he found he could not exclude an invisible God, who was the Avenger of his crimes."

After the death of Domitian, Nerva was next

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 3, c. 18.

saluted emperor, who, finding his feeble age unable to sustain the cares and fatigues of government, adopted Trajan for his associate and successor. Notwithstanding the civil and military talents of Trajan, which have been celebrated by contemporary and succeeding writers, he has not escaped the censure of having been one of the persecutors of the Church. His crime consisted, however, rather in suffering the edicts of Nero and Domitian against the Christians to be enforced than in giving any fresh impulse to the fury of persecution. Having ascertained by his correspondence with Pliny, who was pro-consul in Bithynia, that the Christians were an inoffensive body of men, whose only crime consisted in the fervour of their devotion to their God, and the singular purity of their lives, Trajan directed that they should not be sought after, yet, if discovered, that they should be punished if they refused to expiate their guilt by sacrificing to the gods: a sentence containing such an unnatural mixture of affected clemency, but real severity, as to have called forth the caustic irony of Tertullian, who pressed the reasonable alternative of inquiring if they were guilty, or of exemption from punishment if they were innocent.<sup>1</sup> The reign of Trajan was stained with the blood of Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, who, though sinking under the weight of six-score years, sustained with unconquerable firmness the torments of a lingering martyrdom. Ignatius, too, Bishop of Antioch, and one of the most illustrious martyrs of the Church,

<sup>1</sup> *Bibliothèque des Pères*, tom. 1, p. 165.

suffered under Trajan. The lessons of charity and patience which he addressed to the different churches on his way to Rome, have been fortunately preserved, and form one of the most precious relics of ecclesiastical antiquity.

The persecution which raged under Trajan was not suspended by his death, but retained all its violence during the commencement of the reign of Hadrian. This emperor, however, listened with respect to the apologies of two Christians, Quadratus and Aristides.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the influence and the seasonable remonstrances of Serenius Granianus,<sup>2</sup> one of the pro-consuls of Asia, who complained of the injustice of sacrificing the Christians to the fury of an angry populace, without the shadow of guilt or the form of trial, its violence began gradually to subside. But though the Christians experienced his humanity the Jews found a terrible scourge in the vengeance of Hadrian. About three-score years had now elapsed since the ruin of Jerusalem, and, notwithstanding the destruction of their temple, the abolition of the law, the dispersion of the entire nation, and the other tremendous chastisements in which the Jews were taught to feel the anger of heaven, still the minds of that perverse and obstinate people were not subdued to the level of their condition. Impatient of the Roman yoke, they seized every opportunity of annoying the Roman governors, and the infliction of their cruelties was always exasperated by the most dire and malig-

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 4, c. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

nant fanaticism. The repeated impostures with which their credulity was hitherto cheated, did not yet cure their delusion, and they acknowledged in Barchocebas the star of the Messiah, who was destined to avenge their disgrace and extend their dominion. Egypt, Cyrene, and Mesopotamia were the scenes of the most outrageous cruelties of the Jews and of the severe retaliation of the Romans.<sup>1</sup> Hadrian resolved not only to quell the furious spirit of insurrection, but to extinguish for ever the hopes that inspired it. On the site of the ancient city he built another, to which he gave the name *Ælia*. Five hundred thousand of the unhappy people were the victims of war or pestilence, and they were banished under the severest penalties to such a distance from Jerusalem that they could not even view the natal spot which was the supposed incentive of all their rebellions.

Hadrian was succeeded by Antoninus, under whom the Christians enjoyed a transient repose. This emperor obtained from a decree of the senate the surname of Pius, and as a proof that that was not a venal compliment extorted by fear or bestowed by flattery, the suffrage of the senate has been confirmed by the unanimous voice of posterity. Had he continued to reign alone the blood of the Christians would have been spared. But he devolved on Marcus Aurelius a share in the government of the empire, and hence to the reign of Pius have been imputed some of the persecutions which have stained the character of his associate. Marcus, who was a follower of the Stoic

philosophy, illustrated its stern precepts in his unfeeling indifference to human suffering. He not only revived the obsolete edicts of his predecessors, but diffused the spirit of persecution over some of the provinces in which it was hitherto but little felt. The province of Gaul was that which was most distinguished by the sufferings and triumphs of the Christians. He directed an edict to the prefect of that province to put to death all who should refuse to abjure the Christian religion, and from the inhumanity of the governors the emperor experienced a ready compliance. Eusebius, in the fifth book of his "Ecclesiastical History," describes the extent and fury of the persecution, and transcribes an eloquent epistle from the churches of Lyons and Vienne to those of Asia, detailing the invincible heroism displayed by the martyrs of Gaul, and singling out as an object of peculiar admiration the aged Pothinus, Bishop of Lyons, whose courage was not chilled by the age of four-score and ten years, and who, amidst the slow torments inflicted by his executioners, exhorted the spectators to suffering and glory.<sup>1</sup>

The same historian<sup>2</sup> has preserved a letter from the Church of Smyrna to the churches throughout Pontus, recording the cruelties which they experienced during the reign of the Antonines. The quivering flesh was either scraped with shells or torn with whips until the very bones were bared, and when all the refinements of human torture were exhausted they were consigned

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 5, c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 4, c. 15.

to the mercy of wild beasts—for it was a mercy to be delivered from the slow and lingering torments of their inexorable executioners. Among the martyrs who suffered on that occasion, Polycarp was the most distinguished. I regret that the narrow limits of these sketches forbid the transcription of the entire epistle of the people of Smyrna, in which all the circumstances of the death of the venerable bishop are recorded. The calm resignation with which he awaited his last hour; the noble dignity of his demeanour before Quadratus, the pro-consul; the respectful firmness with which he preferred death to the ignominious bargain of life; the savage and tumultuous joy of the Jews and heretics, who thirsted for the blood of Polycarp, together with their eager competition in procuring the instruments of death; the cheerfulness with which he courted martyrdom, as well as the tranquil intrepidity of his soul, which seemed, amidst the flames, insensible to suffering, are told with such dramatic effect, though with so much simplicity, as to make the martyrdom of the Bishop of Smyrna one of the most interesting pieces in ecclesiastical story.

During the reign of Aurelius we are told that, whilst this prince fought against the Germans and Sarmatians, a Christian legion fell on their knees, and that at the same instant a violent thunder-storm arose, which scattered the enemies, whilst the rain with which it was accompanied restored the fainting strength of the Roman army.<sup>1</sup> The fact was too notorious to be

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 5, c. 5.



questioned even by the Pagans, though its cause was controverted, and Tertullian boldly appeals to the letters of Marcus, which at once attested this miraculous event, and entirely ascribed it to the prayers of the Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Justin, a Grecian philosopher and convert to the Christian religion, wrote two apologies addressed to the Antonines,<sup>2</sup> in which he exposes the folly of the pagan worship, and defends the superior purity of the Christian religion. These apologies contain a very edifying picture of the primitive Christians, they lead us more into the privacy of their domestic habits and ecclesiastical polity than any other ancient document,<sup>3</sup> and furnish incontestable arguments of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, which was generally administered by the bishop, who presided in these assemblies. Besides these apologies Justin has left us his controversy with the Jews in the person of Tryphon, and his orations against the Gentiles, in which he vindicates the truth of the Gospel against the errors of both. His conference with Tryphon is a curious monument of ancient controversy conducted according to the Socratic method. The Jewish doctor and Christian philosopher accidentally met in the streets of Ephesus. Recognising one another by the peculiarity of their dress and habits, they seated themselves on two rude pillars of stone and discussed the relative merits of the Law and the Gospel. The companions of Tryphon, who

<sup>1</sup> "Bibliothèque des Pères de l'Eglise," tom. 1, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. l. 4, c. 14.

<sup>3</sup> "Bibliothèque des Pères de l'Eglise," tom. 1, p. 52, &c.

seemed to have been disciples of Democritus, were disposed to treat with unbecoming levity the arguments of Justin. However, neither his temper nor his seriousness were disturbed by their rudeness, and the reader of this conference will discover how little the lapse of ages has been able to add to those luminous views of ancient prophecy by which the primitive Fathers demonstrated the truth of the Christian religion. But Justin gave a stronger proof of his own conviction than any argument could furnish: for he sealed with his blood his belief in that religion which he illustrated by his life and defended by his writings.

Marcus Antoninus was succeeded by his son Commodus, under whose profligate and cruel tyranny the Christians enjoyed a toleration which was denied them under the philosophical reign of his father. This peace continued undisturbed by the intestine troubles that agitated the empire, when, as on a former occasion, three candidates, Albinus, Niger, and Severus, concealed their own ambition under the decent pretext of avenging the death of Pertinax, as well as the insult that was offered the imperial dignity by Julianus Didius, who ignominiously purchased it from the Pretorian guards, who murdered the emperor. Severus, the successful candidate, had scarce obtained secure possession of the throne by removing all his competitors, when he raised against the Christian religion the sharpest persecution it had hitherto sustained. The animated and indignant tone to which the style of Eusebius' rises in recording the sufferings of the

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 6, c. 1-2.

Christians is a proof of the horrors of that persecution. The province of Africa was desolated by the cruel fanaticism of the governors ; Thebes and Alexandria, in Egypt, were the theatres which exhibited the sharpest conflicts between the patience of the Christians and the sanguinary rage of their persecutors, and I am only literally translating the expressions of Gregory of Tours, that the names and numbers of the martyrs could only be recorded in the Book of Life, and that the streets of the most populous cities streamed with Christian blood.

It was on this occasion that the Church was illustrated by the death of Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, who, after having diligently tracked the heretics through all the windings of their systems, and successfully exerted his powerful mediation in averting from the Asiatics the vengeance of Victor, the Roman Pontiff, rivalled in his death the courage of Pothinus, his predecessor. Of all the primitive Fathers none appears to have had better opportunities of contrasting the novel reveries of the sectaries with the sound and hereditary doctrine of the Apostles. Disciple of St. Polycarp, who was the disciple of St. John, he formed the third link in the chain of apostolical tradition. In a letter<sup>1</sup> to Florinus, a follower of the Persian theology of the two principles, he reminds him that in his youth he often saw him in the society of the venerable Polycarp, from whom they had imbibed a different doctrine. He then gives vent to all those feelings of reverence that

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 5, c. 20,

are impressed on the ductile minds of children by an early contact with the holy ministers of religion, and tells of the form, the mien, the habits of the venerable man, the chair from which he delivered his lessons, and his allusions to his frequent and familiar converse with St. John, the last of the Apostles, and concludes by a solemn protestation, that if that apostolical prelate should have heard the impious doctrines of Florinus, he should close his ears against them, exclaiming, in sorrow, that he was reserved for such degenerate times, and fly from the very place that was profaned by such blasphemies. The praise of Irenæus has exercised the eloquence of the Greek and Latin Fathers. He has obtained a richer reward in the honours that are paid to his memory by the veneration of the Catholic Church. The superiority of this reward shall best appear by contrast with two celebrated contemporaries, whose fame would have been as pure as that of Irenæus, if their orthodoxy had corresponded with the splendour of their talents. These contemporaries were Origen and Tertullian, the one a native of Alexandria, and the other of Carthage. With a piety and courage far above his years Origen, when yet a boy, panted for the crown of martyrdom. The importunity of his zeal could not be subdued by the remonstrances of a tender mother, who was obliged to resort to the artifice of hiding his clothes to divert him from his purpose. Unable to obtain the object of his desires, the youthful Origen writes to his father, Leonides, who was then in prison for the faith, and exhorts him not to sacrifice the immediate prospect of glory to a false

compassion for his children. Few have given such proofs of precocious talents as Origen, to whom the care of the school of Alexandria, then the most famous in the world, was committed before he completed his twentieth year. As he grew up he poured upon the world the profusion of a mind fraught with the richest treasures of scriptural knowledge. The fame of his eloquence and erudition drew crowds of disciples to his school in Alexandria, among whom might be numbered the most eminent of the Christian Fathers as well as of the pagan philosophers. Among the illustrious visitors whom curiosity prompted to see this extraordinary man was Mammœa,<sup>1</sup> the mother of the Emperor Alexander, and, like the Queen of Saba, she found that fame was but a feeble echo of the wisdom of the son of Leonides. His life was embittered by persecutions, which death had not appeased; and his memory has experienced all the vicissitudes with which it could be illustrated or obscured by successive apologies or condemnations. Amidst the multiplicity of studies by which his mind was distracted, it is no wonder if he was not equally accurate in all. If his vast and excursive genius had led him into some extravagant notions, the circumstance is not to excite our surprise, since the decisions of the Church had not yet clearly marked the boundaries between orthodoxy and error. At all events, the errors of Origen appear divested of that feature of obstinacy which gives error its chief deformity; and though the deviations of genius

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 6, c. 21.

ought never to be pardoned an account of the glory that sometimes surrounds them, posterity seems to have done justice to the memory of Origen in expressing nought but a respectful compassion for the man, who never disdained the control of the authority of the Church, and whose errors were less the errors of presumption and of pride than the effusion of an over-ardent benevolence.

I regret that the character of his great contemporary is not susceptible of a like extenuation. Born among a people proverbially savage, his mind retained all the bold and rugged features of the national character. The spirit of the Christian religion, so calculated to refine and humanise the mind, served but to exalt to a loftier tension the vigour of a character naturally rigid and severe. His unbending soul felt no compassion for human weakness; and in his treatise on penance he almost forgets, that there was an infusion of oil to temper the acrid wine, with which the wounds of the bruised man were bound up by the good Samaritan. His two great works are his "Apologies" and "Prescriptions," the one addressed to Severus, after the examples of Justin and Athenagoras; the other directed against the heretics of his time, and especially applicable to those of every age, to the consummation of the world. The former work is the ablest refutation of paganism which has ever been composed—if, indeed, so absurd and clumsy a system could be said to require refutation;—and the reader is at a loss which to admire most in this masterpiece of eloquence and satire, the irony of Lucian or the fire of Demosthenes.

The latter, with a prospective comprehension, destroys all the noxious productions of heresy by striking effectually at their root, and might not be inaptly compared to the labours of Hercules by levelling one deadly blow at the Hydra, whose heads were multiplying under each particular and successive warfare. It has been remarked, and the remark is singularly exemplified in Tertullian, that the character of the individual is generally impressed upon his productions. In his writings you behold the evident traces of a mind, forcibly seized with truth, and rapidly hurried to conclusions by the strength of its own convictions. Stern and inexorable, he insists on unconditional surrender ; and if his arguments are resisted he literally smites his enemies with the compressive and ponderous sententiousness of his style. Bent on one object, the quickest and securest road to victory, he loses sight of every other ; and so despotic was his reasoning faculty, and so intolerant of every minor excellence, that it kept at a stern and unapproachable distance all the lighter graces of composition. The vehemence of his genius hurried him into transitions rapid, abrupt, and sometimes unintelligible ; and the writings of Tertullian have been, as justly as ingeniously, compared to a deep mine difficult to be worked, but the richness of whose ore is well worth the labour of extraction.

It is, however, a melancholy reflection that dark was the close of the brilliant career of Tertullian, whose name is not more expressive of splendid talents than it is ominous of their perversion. From the highest elevation to which unrivalled celebrity could have

raised him, Tertullian fell ; and though there was nothing to break the violence of that fall, there was little to excite the sympathies of mankind. His forbidding and repulsive haughtiness disentitled him to that commiseration which the more amiable character of Origen inspired, and the peculiar circumstances of his apostasy only aggravated his humiliation. Had he been defeated by one of the mighty ones accustomed to conquer, his defeat might have been patiently endured. Had he been dazzled by a body, the danger of whose course might have been forgotten in the fascination of its delusion, it would have lessened our surprise, though it might have deepened our compassion. But to have fallen a victim to the fanaticism of Montanus, one of the most besotted and licentious empirics that ever disgraced the annals of religious imposture, reads as humiliating a lesson of human pride as it conveys an awful warning of its punishment. And to behold the man, whose religious triumphs were graced with the trophies of every error, now dragged in the ignominious train of the captives of a blasphemous impostor, reminds us of the just and appropriate language of the prophet, "and the chariot of his glory became the shame of the house of the Lord."

The persecutions that afflicted the Church, from the death of Severus to the time of Diocletian, shall be compressed into a brief narrative, though extended over the space of a century. I shall pass over the tragic reigns of Caracalla and Geta, the sons of Severus, of whom the one murdered the other in the arms of his mother, as well as that of Heliogabalus, a monster who



disgraced human nature by the studied variety of his lusts. The next reign is that of Alexander Severus, on which the friend of virtue and religion, fatigued with the repetition of imperial cruelty, might love to pause if the rapidity of our biographical sketches were not incompatible with the insertion of the minute particulars of his life.

Among the persecutors of the Church ten are generally singled out by ecclesiastical writers as the persons who accomplished the prophetic predictions. Five have already passed in review before us—Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Severus—marked, however, by various shades of cruelty in their conduct towards the Christians. It would seem that Providence had placed Alexander in the midst of these and the five succeeding persecutors as if to allow the Christians an interval of repose to repair their shattered strength against the more trying conflicts in which they were yet to be engaged. Invested with the imperial purple at the age of fourteen he united the vigour and firmness of Trajan with the mature virtues of Antoninus. Far from being dazzled by the elevation to which he was raised, he made use of it only to take a wider survey of the extent of his obligations. Moderate, nay, abstemious in his habits, he retrenched the superfluities of the imperial household, which hitherto might be compared to a bottomless gulf, which was swallowing up the revenues of the empire. Whether he had imbibed his reverence for the God of the Christians from his mother, Mammœa, who had conversed with Origen, we know not ; but certain it is that

the mistaken piety of the emperor placed him among his tutelary divinities. His love of justice he displayed by the frequent repetition and the practical observance of the Christian precept: "Do to others as you would be done by;" and this golden rule, legibly inscribed on the walls of his palace, proclaimed to the world the virtues of Alexander. Like Augustus, he mingled in familiar intercourse with the virtuous citizens of Rome, without, however, the constraint of that crafty policy which obliged the first of the emperors to assume a disguise of moderation to reconcile the sturdy republicans to the change of government. He dispensed with the excessive pomp which the Oriental monarchs mistake for dignity, adopting as a maxim that the dignity of the empire is sustained by virtue and not by vain ostentation—a maxim worthy the adoption of every civil and ecclesiastical ruler. Disposed to cultivate the virtues of peace, he displayed, amidst the perils of war, a military courage worthy of the best days of the republic. Like the hero of Macedon, he returned from Persia graced with the triumph of the conquest of its kings. Like him he had not yet attained his thirtieth year; and though the one devoted his life to promote the happiness, and the other to achieve the destruction of mankind; such is the capriciousness of fame, that the world has been filled with the warlike sound of the son of Philip, whilst it has been almost indifferent to the mild and more useful virtues of the Roman Alexander.

The memory of the transient benefits conferred by Severus was embittered by the sad contrast between

him and the savage Maximin, whose elevation to the throne was purchased by the murder of one of the most virtuous emperors that ever wielded the Roman sceptre. The reign of Maximin was no less tragic to the Christian name than it was dishonourable to the dignity and fatal to the happiness of the empire. His gigantic and misshapen form seemed to be a fit emblem of the ferocity of his soul, and the sympathy between both was evinced by his unexampled cruelty to the Christians. His hatred of the Christian name was first inspired by policy. Numbers of the family of Alexander had embraced the Christian religion, and like Herod or Domitian, the cruel Maximin consigned the whole race to a general persecution, in order to involve in their ruin such Christians of the house of Severus as might disturb the security of his empire.<sup>1</sup> However, after the destruction of that family, his fury was chiefly directed against the Prelates of the Church, hoping that the flock would be easily dispersed after the destruction of the Pastors. The interval from the death of Maximin, to the accession of Decius is entirely filled up with the account of the rapid rise and fall of ephemeral emperors, who were too much engaged in the work of mutual destruction to disturb the progress of the Christian religion. Decius, however, raised such a persecution against them as if he were resolved to extinguish them for ever. It has been remarked that the deaths of the primitive martyrs have been diversified by subsequent writers to exalt

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 6, c. 28.

the merits of their heroism. The remark is as insidious as it is untrue. The sufferings of the martyrs required not the aid of fiction to embellish them : no subsequent writer has surpassed Eusebius in the eloquence or variety of his descriptions of their torments. The perusal of any more recent history can convey only a faint image of the melancholy reality.<sup>1</sup> The letters of Dionysius, a martyr of Alexandria, in their simple and artless relation of the varied torments which the martyrs endured under Decius exceed in value a thousand compilations of more recent and ambitious writers. The former are like the rays of the sun, striking the eye with all their original strength and brilliancy, the latter may be compared to the same rays, weakened by every polished medium through which they are refracted.

The persecution which was kindled by Decius was not extinguished by his death. Gallus, who next occupied the throne, without the eminent qualities which distinguished his predecessor, inherited all his hatred for the Christians. His reign was short, as was that of most of the emperors, who were but the transient creatures of military caprice, and the persecutions which were sustained during his sway, are generally confounded with that of Decius. Torn by intestine factions and military revolutions, which rapidly succeeded each other, the empire was frequently desolated by famine and pestilence and the other usual calamities which accompany the suspension of the arts of peace.

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. l. 6, c. 40, 41, 42.

The furious prejudice which blinded the pagans in the time of Tertullian descended without abatement, perhaps with increased energy, to their successors; and if the Tiber had overflowed its banks, or the Nile withheld its accustomed inundations, the public clamours demanded the blood of the Christians. The public fury was more generally directed to their chiefs, and accordingly Cornelius, the Roman Pontiff, was one of the first victims who, during the persecution of Gallus, had obtained the crown of martyrdom.

It was during the tragic evils which afflicted the empire at this period that the zeal of Gregory, Bishop of Neocæsarea, was illustrated by the most stupendous miracles. The pestilence which ravaged the city became to him a signal instrument of enlarging the boundaries of the Church. The commencement of the plague coincided with the celebration of a solemn festival in honour of the gods; and the citizens, finding themselves confined in the amphitheatre, ejaculated a rash prayer to their divinities to accommodate their votaries by enlarging its dimensions. Gregory, on hearing the circumstance, observed with grief that there should be in future too much room for the number of the inhabitants. The pestilence quickly spread among the people; neither age nor rank escaped its awful visitation. Such was its malignity, that it baffled all the resources of the medical art, and certain death marked its desolating progress. The charities of life were suspended; those who were sound sought to preserve life by avoiding every contact with the diseased; the streets were piled with unburied corpses,

and many of the dying, preferring the decency of burial to a few days of lingering existence, slowly crawled to the catacombs, where they expired without the hope of human succour. It was on this occasion that the charity of the Christians displayed itself, and chiefly that of Gregory, in soothing the horrors of the pestilence. From some homes, into which the holy Bishop entered, the contagion disappeared. Numbers of the pagans flocked to him, offering to embrace the Christian religion, provided he freed them from the awful scourge. The saint, like another Moses, prayed for his people, and, like Moses, his prayers found acceptance in the sight of heaven. The infidels of Neocæsarea were more deserving of such favours than those of Egypt; and Gregory had the consolation to offer his thanksgiving to the Almighty, that, though at his accession to the episcopacy he found but seventeen Christians, he left at his dying hour but the same number of pagans.

Æmilianus, the immediate successor of Gallus, being hurled from the throne by the same military caprice by which he was elevated, Valerian was invested with the purple. Happy would it have been for him had he remained in a subordinate situation, since he was one of those characters who, in the first dignity, lose all the reputation of their past life. The qualities of Valerian well fitted him for the severe office of a Roman censor: an emperor required much loftier attributes; hence, the virtues of the one disappeared in the majestic range of the duties of the other. The commencement of his reign was marked

by peculiar clemency to the Christians ; but he listened with too easy credulity to the artful insinuations of an Egyptian sage or magician, by whom he was persuaded that they were a dangerous sect. The fury of his edicts was peculiarly felt in Egypt and Palestine, and Eusebius has preserved a valuable epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria, which depicts in lively colours the cruelties inflicted by the emperor.

Africa, too, was desolated by the persecution of Valerian, and Carthage was fated to deplore the death, and Alexandria the exile, of their bishops. Dionysius, after encountering all the evils of banishment, was afterwards permitted to return to the see of Alexandria. It is a matter of doubt, whether Carthage was more illustrated by the life or martyrdom of St. Cyprian. His life was employed in enforcing, by his virtues and his writings, the precepts of the Christian religion ; his death gave the last perfection to his character. Born of pagan parents, and educated in all the pride and vanity which paganism inspired, Cyprian had attained the full age of manhood before his conversion. A large fortune, which he inherited from his parents, fostered all the worldly notions to which he had been trained, and the rank of senator, which he also held, opened a wide career to the exercise of his ambition. His education gave him an intimate acquaintance with the masters of profane wisdom, and, by a diligent study of those models, he was enabled to catch the spirit of their eloquence. To a person reared in prejudices utterly opposed to the maxims of the Gospel, a religion

recommending mortification of heart and meekness of spirit had naturally but little attraction. Grace, however, soon subdued the impediments which nature had thrown in the way, and through the zeal of Cecilius, a venerable priest, whom Cyprian afterwards revered as father, the vain and voluptuous senator of Carthage became one of the most humble and mortified followers of Christ. The King of Ninive (I transcribe the forcible allusion of St. Jerome,) was brought down from the throne of his pride by the preaching of Jonas, and the robes of state were gladly exchanged for the sackcloth. His sanctity soon elevated him to the government of the Church of Carthage, and never was it blessed with a holier or more intrepid defender of its doctrine and its discipline. The reader has already seen how he was the zealous champion of the unity of the Church, when the ambition of Novatian attempted to tear it asunder. The seat of St. Peter he represents as the centre of Catholic unity, and compares the other churches of the world to the rays of the sun diverging from the same source, or the branches of a tree sustained by the same trunk, or to so many rivers all fed from the same fountain. The inexorable enemy of vice he inveighed with peculiar warmth against the Christians who had fallen in the fury of persecution, and with still greater vehemence against the facility with which they were restored to the communion of the Church. A custom, which a laudable piety had introduced, degenerated in his time into a pernicious abuse. Those who had fallen in



persecution, and passed through a part of their penitential course, were wont to solicit in their favour the interposition of the martyrs and confessors of the faith. It was difficult to refuse to listen to the mediation of individuals, who were going to leave the world and to become the fixed and unchangeable friends of the Almighty. Hence the bishops occasionally condescended to abridge the period or to mitigate the severity of public penance on behalf of some individuals who were recommended to their indulgence by the favourable attestation of those Christian heroes. However, these indulgences became too frequent, and the facility with which Christians were restored to the Church after the guilt of apostasy, was calculated to diminish the sense of horror for their fall. Against this pernicious abuse the Bishop of Carthage thundered forth all his eloquence, and denounced the daring sacrilege of coming, reeking with the blood of victims immolated to idols, to seat themselves at the table of the Lord. Well might he exercise the privilege of a wholesome severity against vice. Having spared nothing in himself, he wished, like another apostle, that others should follow his own example. If he used more of the wine than the oil in treating his spiritual patients, it was because the inveteracy of the disorders required such a cure. The firmness with which he himself suffered death, proves that he exacted no courage of which he was not prepared to give the example. Aware that he was the very soul that infused its own fortitude into his flock, the pro-consul

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of Africa, the willing instrument of the cruelty of Valerian, resolved upon putting him to death. The alternative of death or of worshipping the gods was proposed to the saint, a thin and awkward disguise by which these cruel monsters strove to veil their inhumanity. He chose, without hesitation, the alternative of death. "We therefore order that you be beheaded," was the sentence of the judge. "The Lord be praised," was the prompt and intrepid reply of Cyprian. He was then conducted into a spacious field, the place of his execution. With meek and patient fortitude he stripped himself of his outer garment, covered his eyes, and received the stroke of the executioner, thus exemplifying in his death that Christian courage of which in his life and writings he was such an unconquerable assertor.

It was during the same persecution of Valerian that Laurence, the Roman deacon, illustrated his religion by a prodigy of patient fortitude that has fixed on this extraordinary character the admiration of posterity. When Xystus, the Roman Pontiff, was led to martyrdom, Laurence, as if envying the happiness of his lot, and repining at his being left alone, remarks to the holy bishop, that as he was his minister in offering the divine mysteries, he was also entitled to be companion of his martyrdom. The bishop consoles him with the assurance that his courage was reserved for a more trying combat, and that he should follow him in three days. The Roman prefect, being informed that vast treasures were accumulated in the Church,

hoped to become possessed of them through the deacon, to whose care they were entrusted. Accordingly he sends for Laurence, whom he treats with courtesy. The holy man acknowledges the wealth of which the Church is in possession, and promises to exhibit it before the prefect, whose avarice he thus inflames with the hope of the sacred spoils. In the interval, the deacon takes care to expend whatever remained of this wealth on the necessities of the poor, of whom the Church of Rome then supported fifteen hundred, and melted down some of the sacred vessels, rather than that they should be converted, like those of the Jewish temples into instruments of revelry and profanation. On the day appointed with the prefect, Laurence exhibits a long and numerous array of the poor, and blind, and lame, pointing them out to the prefect as the depositaries of his treasures. The keen and caustic raillery which was conveyed in the saint's expressions inflamed the rage of the prefect, who instantly ordered him to be roasted on a gridiron. The force of the material fire which consumed his flesh was neutralised by the stronger ardour of divine love which inflamed the soul of the martyr. The calm serenity with which he bore the slow tortures of the half-smothered embers made such an impression upon many of the spectators as to induce them to become Christians. The Roman history furnished more examples of heroic fortitude than could be found in the annals of paganism, yet the senators confessed by their conversion that they could not equal the martyrdom of Laurence. The tranquil-

lity, nay, the cheerfulness with which he endured his lingering death showed that he was sustained by the same spirit which fortified the patience of Job ; and pain, and feeling, and death itself were swallowed up in the contemplation of immortality.

As I purpose not to introduce the Roman emperors, except when they are connected with the Christian religion, I shall almost pass over the intermediate names that occur between Valerian and Diocletian, whose persecution closes the last scene of Christian suffering, and whose unparalleled magnitude in guilt raises, to an appropriate climax, the cruelty of the persecutors. Aurelian, it is true, ranked among the ten persecutors of the Church. But the edicts which he published were towards the end of his reign, and he was taken off by an untimely death before they were put in execution. Like the ocean that heaves, after the storm subsides by which it was first agitated, the Church, after the death of Aurelian, felt, in the sufferings of its martyrs, the effects of the cruel spirit which he imparted to the governors of the distant provinces.

It would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the persecution of Diocletian, which surpassed that of its predecessors in the extent as well as intensity of the sufferings which it inflicted. Eusebius literally assures us that the work of slaughter was not unfrequently suspended because the edge of the axe was blunted, or because it dropped from the wearied hands of the executioners ; and the eloquent Lactantius con-

fesses that no description could be adequate to the sanguinary rage of persecution. As if the cool malignity of Diocletian alone were insufficient, the Christians were doomed to sustain the united vengeance of four emperors, who, with the exception of Constantius, were the ready instruments of the cruelty of Diocletian. The persecution was not confined to the persons of the Christians, it embraced every object connected with their religion. Their books were burned, their temples were destroyed ; and now it would seem as if all the powers of earth had conspired against the Church of Christ, not only to effect its ruin, but even to obliterate its remembrance. This was the last ordeal through which it was fated to pass, and having come forth triumphant, it carried with it the splendid attestation that it was not in the power of man to extinguish what God had decreed to be immortal. Its persecutors soon disappeared from the earth. Their tragic deaths, as detailed by Lactantius, exhibit visible manifestations of the Divine vengeance ; and, while their names are consigned to merited infamy, the memory of the martyrs, who triumphed over their rage, is embalmed in the veneration of mankind. The cross, which before was an object of scandal and of shame, became now a badge of glory and of triumph. From the day that it appeared in the heavens to Constantine and his army, glittering with radiance and exhibiting the assurance of victory, the cross was taken under the protection of the Cæsars, and its banners floated over the fallen temples of paganism. Constantine, imitat-

ing the Eastern sages who followed the guidance of the star, embraced the faith of that cross which conducted him to the throne of the Roman world: and by his conversion the Church was permitted to enjoy in triumph and repose the fruit of her past suffering.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE fourth century, whose history we are going to commence, opens with the rise of Arianism—the first, I may call it, as well as the most fatal heresy that ever afflicted the Church, whether we consider the magnitude and extent of its mischief or the length of its duration. When I say the first, I mean not to impeach the veracity of ecclesiastical historians, or to deny the existence of Sabellius or Paul of Samosata or the other heretics whose names and errors are recorded by Tertullian and Irenæus. But this was the first heresy that fixed the attention and enlisted the passions of the whole Christian world. Hitherto a crowd of obscure heretics might obtrude themselves and again disappear without leaving aught but a faint memory of the transient apparitions. The stage was filled by scenes of deeper intent and more important personages; and while kings, and emperors, and governors passed in review, occupying the spectators with slaughter and the blood of the holiest victims—Priests and Pontiffs—it was not to be expected that those ludicrous heretics could divert such fixed attention to the contemplation of their own follies. Persecution raged with too much violence to suffer men to

be occupied with lesser interest, and errors worse than those which, in the fourth century, had shaken the world with discord, were scarcely heard amidst the storm of the preceding period. This tempest had at last subsided in the conversion of Constantine to that religion of which the symbol seen by him in the heavens gave him an assurance of victory over Maxentius. The double vision of Constantine, one of which appeared to him by day in company with the entire army, and the other in a dream on the night of the battle, is attested by Eusebius in his life of the emperor, and Lactantius, and Philostorgius, and Arian historians of their times. Its memory is still preserved in the most ancient medals, records which are much respected by the most suspicious criticism.

But perhaps one of the most satisfactory proofs of their authenticity is the standard which was formed after the appearance in the heavens, and borne on the day of battle before the entire army, and the subsequent conversion of the emperor, in gratitude for the victory which he obtained. Twelve years elapsed from the conversion of Constantine to the translation of the empire to Byzantium, a city which has since perpetuated his own name. During that time he was occupied in guarding himself against the intrigues of Licinius, the last of his rivals, whom he defeated at length, and whose death, in the year 324, may be supposed to have closed the persecutions in the Church. Scarce was Constantine relieved from the fears of his rivals, when he meditated the foundation of a new capital—a measure which gave rise to the celebrated



legend of Constantine having ceded Rome to Pope Sylvester and his successors. The belief of this celebrated donation is now resigned by the most ardent partisans of the temporal authority of the Roman Pontiffs. During three centuries after the death of Constantine, the emperors of the East claimed the same jurisdiction in Rome which they exerted in every part of the empire. What may have been the motives of Constantine in abandoning the ancient capital of the empire it might be difficult at this distance of time to conjecture. He might have been influenced by the superior advantages of the position of Byzantium, which opened the commerce of the world, and was doubtless swayed by the ambition of perpetuating his own name by identifying it with the capital of the empire. Various motives of policy may be assigned by the profane. In this event the Christian may contemplate the workings of Divine Providence. Hitherto the religion and the State were so completely identified, that the same individual united in his own person the twofold dignity of Emperor and Supreme Pontiff. Constantine beheld the triumphs of a new religion over the ruins of paganism, of which the chief had fixed his residence in Rome. Without any worldly rank or influence, those humble individuals had so provoked the jealousy of the emperors, that it is remarked by St. Cyprian, they should have rather borne with a competitor of their throne than with those who were stripping them of all their reverence by usurping the honours of the priesthood. What wonder, then, if Constantine should have dreaded the proximity of individuals before

whose august virtues the greatness of the emperor was diminished, and should have therefore resolved to remove to a secure distance from their oppressive ascendancy. Resigning, then, the fable, the fact is still true that Constantine did resign Rome to the authority of the Popes. He might have been swayed by policy : his policy was but the instrument of a superior wisdom. Rome was called by the profane historians the Eternal City. Like the prophecies of Balaam or of Caiphas, we might discover in this singular appellation a meaning of which they were unconscious. In the counsels of Providence it was destined to be the visible centre of the eternal empire which was to succeed those that had gone before ; and, in appropriating the Eternal City to the exclusive residence of its chiefs, we behold but a just correspondence between the capital and the empire, of which time alone will be the end.

Scarcely had Constantine triumphed over the last of his competitors than a new enemy began to trouble the repose of his dominions. Had Arius appeared at any former period, like his predecessors, his errors would have been disregarded. The peace of the empire became favourable to his view—a circumstance to which he is more indebted than to any personal talent for the disastrous celebrity which he has obtained in the Christian Church. Of a person so distinguished all must feel some curiosity to learn the particulars of his character. In the various mediums through which it is transmitted it would be difficult, perhaps, to view the strong, and distinct, and original impression. Like

every individual who awakens contending passions, his image cannot be seen but through an agitated medium, and therefore it is only by a combination of the vices with which he is reproached by his friends, and the virtues that are admitted by his opponents, that we may form a safe estimate of his character. A Lybian by birth, he early repaired to Alexandria, which was then the chief mart of philosophy and literature. His person was tall, his deportment modest, his manners insinuating, and his conversation lively. To a grave and religious exterior he united a ready, a persuasive eloquence, and exemplified the proverbial Punic hypocrisy, by concealing a turbulent and ambitious spirit under the meek exterior of virtue. The origin of his heresy is ascribed to different causes: by some to the imprudence of Alexander in attempting to explain with too much precision the mystery of the Trinity, by others to the workings of wounded pride on finding his own prospects intercepted by the promotion of Alexander to the see of Alexandria. However, both narratives are not incompatible. Alexander might have gone too far in explaining a mystery which no reason can fathom. If we could suppose that the errors of Arius arose from a misapprehension of his meaning, a mutual understanding would have reconciled the difference. But we easily quarrel with the opinions of those persons we view with jealousy, and to minds so disposed every trifle is so magnified as to become a serious subject of strife and contention. Such was the cause of the origin of Arianism. Arius aspires to the episcopal chair of Alexandria. The

merit of a worthier candidate defeats his pretensions. The bishop of Alexandria becomes, on that account, the first object of his vengeance, which next embraced the entire Church, until, in the frenzy of his passion, he assailed the Divinity of the Son of God. The Church had long since condemned the errors of Sabellius, who attempted to refine the Trinity of Persons into a mere trinity of names, by reducing the Son and the Holy Ghost into mere abstractions. Alexandria became the theatre on which the abstruse dogmas of Christianity were discussed with most subtilty and freedom. He accommodated himself to the prejudices of those who boldly investigated with the light of reason the mysteries of faith. Alexander offered explanations, which seemed to Arius to border on Sabellianism. Unable to reconcile the Trinity of Persons with the Unity of a simple substance, and anxious to recede from the opinion of his bishop, he chose to divide the nature rather than confound the Persons of the Trinity, and boldly affirmed that Christ was a creature. Alexander, fearing that harshness would provoke his obstinacy, had recourse to the mild expedients of charity and persuasion. The arguments in favour of the Divinity of the Son, which are furnished by the Scripture, were urged by Alexander, of which Arius felt the force. Still unable to conceive the co-existence of the Son with the Father, yet unable to refute the texts which proved His Divinity, he came to the contradictory conclusion that the Word was at the same time a creature, and yet invested with the attributes of the Godhead. Thus in his impatience of one mystery which he could not

comprehend, though it involved no contradiction, he adopted another, evidently repugnant to reason, by transfusing on a creature the incommunicable attributes of the Deity. Such is the simplest explanation which I could extract out of the subtle and tedious details that are left us of the errors of Arius. It was by the magnificent terms in which he spoke of the Word, investing It with all the attributes of God, except His eternal coexistence, that he misled his followers ; and it was on that account that the word “consubstantial” was the most effectual antidote against the poison of his opinions.

Finding that the heresiarch was only collecting insolence from a forbearance which would have reclaimed a more generous spirit, and calling to mind that those who are invested with the government of the Church must break iniquities, Alexander had at length recourse to severity, and in a synod assembled at Alexandria punished his contumacy with the sentence of excommunication. Arius had his partisans, who represented him as an injured man and the victim of persecution. None possessed more art than he, to turn to his own account that tide of sympathy which always flows for the victims of insolent oppression—a sympathy generous in its origin, but sometimes abused in its application.

He traversed Egypt and Asia Minor, and by his insinuating address secured to himself the protection of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia. Constantine at first despised the symptoms of discord, and recommended moderation to the parties. At length the increasing evil threatened the public peace. To arrest

its further progress he, with the consent of the Roman Pontiff, St. Sylvester, assembled at Nice, in Bythinia, the most distinguished bishops of the Christian world, in order that they should attest by their united suffrages the ancient doctrine of the Church, and confirm it by the weight of their judicial authority. Never did the world exhibit a more august assembly or whose decisions were calculated to inspire more veneration. Assembled from the most distant quarters of the earth, from Britain, from Gaul, from Egypt, and Mesopotamia, they collected into one mass the traditions of their respective churches. Some were venerable for their years and sufferings, others distinguished for a vigorous maturity of intellect, which age had not yet impaired, and all with few exceptions, entitled to confidence and respect for the sincerity of their faith and the integrity of their morals. All the gifts of which the Apostle speaks might have been found apportioned among the members of this assembly. There was Potamon, Bishop of Heraclea in Egypt, who still bore on his body the wounds which were inflicted in the persecutions; there was Paphnutius, who had lost his eyes under Maximian; there was Paul of Neocæsarea, who had lost both his hands in the last persecution of Licinius; there was Spiredion, Bishop of Thremiten in Cyprus, eminent for his gifts of prophecy and miracles, whom one of our native prelates may be proud to number among his predecessors; there was James, Bishop of Nisibis, who raised the dead to life, as Theodoret relates;<sup>1</sup> there was Eusebius of

<sup>1</sup> Lib. 4, c. 7

Cæsarea, the most learned man of his own or perhaps any other age, and Athanasius yet only in deacon's orders, and just springing into manhood, who by the precocious talent and learning with which he refuted Arius, and repressed the powerful party of the Eusebians, purchased for himself their implacable and unremitting hostility during the remainder of his life ; there was, finally, Osius, Bishop of Cordova, who with the priests, Vitus and Vicentius, presided over the council as the legates of Pope Sylvester. If the Barbarians of Gaul mistook the majesty of the Roman Senate for an assembly of the gods, what wonder that Constantine should be awed by the presence of an assembly that united the virtues, the wisdom, the harmony, the talent, the gifts of tongues and miracles, that achieved the fall of paganism, and that he should have revered their decrees as the inspiration of heaven. Arius was condemned, and the faith of the Divinity of the Son of God was fixed for ever by the word "consubstantial," which by expressing His identity with the indivisible nature of His Father clearly expressed His eternal coexistence.

After the dissolution of the Council of Nice it might have been expected that the Arian heresy should have been extinguished. It raged with more violence and was more extensively propagated. Until the next General Council of Constantinople, more than thirty councils were held, in which the Arian and Catholic interests alternately prevailed. As it would be quite unnecessary to burden my memory, or fatigue your attention with the repetition of their barren names, I shall only remark that, of all these councils, the condem-

nation or acquittal of St. Athanasius was the principal subject of deliberation. Of these there are four deserving of particular notice—the Council of Tyre, in 334 ; of Sardica, in 347 ; of Sirmium, about the same period ; and of Rimini, in 359.

The Council of Tyre was principally composed of Bishops of the Arian faction, who brought the heaviest charges against St. Athanasius, of which, however, he was providentially acquitted. An impudent woman having been suborned by the Eusebians to impeach him for having assaulted her virtue, a friend of the saint, Timothy by name, interposed, and with a readiness which seemed providential asked the woman could she have the effrontery to accuse him of such a crime. Mistaking him for Athanasius, whom she never saw, she repeated the charge, which exposure of their own infamy covered the Eusebian faction with confusion. However, instead of disarming their hostility it only exasperated it more, and they next accused him of murder, a charge which he refuted in a manner equally providential.

It will, doubtless, appear a matter of astonishment that human nature could have been capable of such malignity, as to have preferred against an innocent individual charges as unfounded as they were atrocious, and that after the clear and satisfactory vindication of his innocence their hate should have been unrelenting as before. But there is no hatred so deadly as that which virtue inspires. A resentment arising from the commission of some injury may be easily forgiven ; but, according to a maxim of a Roman



writer, he that inflicts an injury is generally the last to forgive. "There is a virtue," says St. Jerome, "which the devil cannot endure, and against which he stirs up the bad passions of mankind, which are the ministers of his will." This hatred, which virtue provokes, is the most implacable of all enmities. It is that gratuitous and iniquitous hatred which the Psalmist applies to the Redeemer, *odio iniquo oderunt me gratis*, which, instead of being extinguished by the exposure of calumny, is only exasperated the more, and which never ceases to pursue its victim until death snatches it from its grasp.

Such was the fate of Athanasius, who during the space of forty-six years experienced the most unremitting persecution from the Arians. He was five times banished from his see, and his place was forcibly occupied by their partisans. His sufferings were however serviceable to the Church. He traversed some of the most considerable provinces of Europe, and enlisted in his support the zeal and piety of the faithful, while he diffused the impression of his virtues, his learning, and his wrongs.

In the eventful history of this period, the two most conspicuous characters that force themselves on our view are those of St. Athanasius, and Eusebius the Bishop of Cæsarea. If you wish to have some idea of the merits of the Patriarch of Alexandria, you may consult the funeral oration which was pronounced on him by Gregory of Nazianzen, in which you may be at a loss which to admire most, the magnificence of the theme or the eloquence of his panegyrist. Panegyrics are

justly deemed an unsafe criterion for ascertaining the merit of historical characters, since they are generally conceived in that vague expression which is indiscriminately applied to merits the most dissimilar ; or, if they have anything peculiar or characteristic, the model is generally forgotten in the artist, and they are considered as the creations of a mind which contemplates, what the French call an ideal excellence, rather than as transcripts of any reality in nature. Not so the panegyric of Gregory of Nazianzen. In eulogising the merits of Athanasius, he had a model before him which no eloquence could equal, and the boldest orator, who had aught of experience in the correctness of composition to direct him, could have scarce been guilty of exaggeration when St. Athanasius was his theme.

To me it appears that Eusebius and Athanasius were not only the most distinguished men of their age, but they have struck me as strongly contrasted in their moral and literary characters. In Eusebius we behold the secret partisan, in Athanasius the avowed opponent of Arius. The works of the one are accordingly infected with heresy ; the writings of the other have been adopted by the Church as the standard of her belief. The one may be considered not only an accurate but an eloquent divine, the other not only an elegant but a learned historian. The learning of the one was spread over a larger surface ; the other explored more profoundly the vast and mysterious subjects to which he was confined. Athanasius spent a great portion of his life with the anchorets of the

desert; Eusebius was a courtier, and a frequent attendant at the palace of Constantine. The faith of the one was, on that account, simple, inflexible, and austere; the policy of the other was like a reed shaken by the wind. The zeal with which Athanasius pursued a single object which occupied his whole mind, swelled into a sort of enthusiasm, which to the world wears the appearance of folly; the address and dexterity which Eusebius displayed by mixing in the intrigues of courts and councils, acquired him the reputation of that policy which by the world is deemed wisdom. In short, though Eusebius needs no other aid, and commands attention by his own native lustre, he is always seen in a group of obsequious courtiers, reflecting that light which he borrowed from the throne, by whose splendours they were overshadowed; while Athanasius stands retired and alone, wholly disconnected with any other object, and, amidst the ruins which then were strewed over the Church, appears in the uncontrasted magnificence like a lofty pyramid amidst the solitudes of his own country.







